



Title page

Developing a Human Resources Organisational model
for the effective management of Labour Relations in the
Nigerian Oil and Gas Sector

A Thesis

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions or writings of another.

Signed

Balarabe A. Aliyu

November 2015

Abstract

Human Resources practises and delivery models have evolved rapidly in recent decades, influenced largely by globalisation, technology and the quest for a strategic HR role. There is a lot of debate in literature about the impact of HRM practises on organisational performance, and various HR organisational structures have emerged in trying to improve organisational effectiveness and empower managers to deploy human capital efficiently. In particular, Ulrich's (1997) three-legged stool HR organisational model has been adapted in various forms by many organisations as they seek to improve the HR function. Despite this, there is limited research or evidence of how HR organisational structures influence the management of Labour Relations (LR) in general. The rationale for this study therefore was to evaluate how HR organisational structures drive LR Management, particularly in highly unionised workplaces. I evaluated the HR and LR practises of a leading Nigerian Oil Company, with specific focus on the Nigerian Oil Industry and the objective of developing a HR organisational model that will promote positive LR.

Using semi structured interviews with key respondents from employee, union and management groups in the NOC, the study found that the Union used very effective engagement tactics that leveraged technology and engendered a high level of participation by its members. The NOC having recently adapted the three-legged HR model focused on building an embedded HR team but did not prioritise the resourcing of a specialist LR group. The management of LR was not integrated across the embedded HR organisation and HR advisors were ill equipped to provide on day-to-day LR issues that arose from the Business. The NOC did not actively pursue employee engagement and allowed the union to dominate communication to employees. Collective agreements determined the nature and frequency of communication with Unionised employees. The Unions on the other hand, used various forums and media to reach its members continuously. Supervisors and managers had minimal interaction with the LR function and were not adequately prepared for their new roles as more modern HRM practises were implemented in the organisation.

The study recommends a structure that promotes LR consultation with employees, Supervisors and Managers. Clarity of authority and responsibility of the LR function is crucial within this model, led by an experienced and empowered Manager. A structured Information and Consultation (I&C) process needs to be embedded within the LR structures. A broader base of LR management competencies will be beneficial in a highly unionised workplace. All Embedded HR Advisors as well Business line Managers require in-depth LR development to empower them handle frontline labour issues they frequently encounter. Furthermore, I recommend an integration of the country LR structure with the Regional and Global LR Networks/Centres of Expertise as well as other local associations or platforms to promote sharing of best practises. HR should explore opportunities to collaborate effectively with the union. As trust grows in the organisation, the union can become a key stakeholder to serve as an effective platform for employee engagement. An engaged workforce is a productive workforce, and the LR model developed in this study seeks to improve productivity by adapting the three-legged HR model to suit the unionised workplace.

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Acronyms

BEC	Branch Executive Committee
BL	Business Line
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
COE	Centre of Expertise
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel Development UK
FLS	First Line Supervisors
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Management
I&C	Information and Consultation
JCC	Joint Consultative Committee
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LR	Labour Relations
MOL	Ministry of Labour
NCDMB	Nigerian Content Development Management Board
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Company
NOC	Nigerian Oil Company
NUPENG	National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers
OE	Organisational Effectiveness
OPTS	Oil Producers Trade Sector
PENGASSAN	Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria
SLS	Second Line Supervisors
UK	United Kingdom
UKOC	United Kingdom Oil Company

Chapter one Introduction

1.1 Background

The practise of Human Resources Management (HRM) has evolved over the past decades, changing in tune with demographic shifts and preferences, and responding to new managerial emphasis on Consulting and Business partnership, rather than the traditional provision of personnel services (Boxall et al, 2007). The emergence of the global workplace, driven by technology has changed how organisations are managed. Today, there are various kinds of HR organisational structures in place to optimise service delivery to the business, drive process efficiencies and enable strategic partnership.

Labour Relations (LR) has remained a major part of the Human Resources (HR) discipline, as BL management expect HR practitioners to take a lead in developing and driving strategies that will strengthen alignment with employees and foster a positive work environment overall. In general, the Nigerian oil industry is very dynamic, accounting for more than 80% of the Country's revenue and subject to significant government regulation and interference since commercial production started in the 1950s (Litvin,2003). With major international oil companies holding significant acreage, the Government has encouraged National content development and the participation of local indigenous players. The labour climate is very challenging as these changes create anxieties for oil workers who use the unions as a platform to negotiate for better conditions of service.

There are two main Unions within the Nigerian oil industry, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG). Both unions continue to play an active role in the industry and have been part of the Nigerian labour movement. They have participated and influenced most national labour action within the Nigerian oil and gas industry with significant impact (Oladunni, 1998). Every major company in

the industry has some level of union membership, as Nigerian legislation provides for the fundamental right to union membership (LFN 2000; LFN, 2005). Membership amongst the top oil producers averages 70%, cutting across operations technicians and including a significant percentage of the professional membership (Fajana, 2005). This high level of influence by the unions means that managing them and employees in general tends to be very challenging.

In comparison with what is obtainable in developed economies, the fragile state of national social structures influences the HR approach to managing LR in Nigeria. Social imbalances precipitate a challenging LR climate. Okafor (2007) highlighted how the labour unions evolved as platforms for agitation under British colonialism, and with the rise in fortunes during the post-colonialism boom that the country witnessed, Unions became legally backed associations that focused mainly on the protection of workers' rights in the oil sector. Although the local contexts are often different, there is a drive towards standardizing HR organisational structures within the corporation, across different affiliates. From a LR management perspective, the pressures and priorities are also different, as Unionisation in the UK as an example, is at relatively lower levels than Nigeria. However, given the extensive experience in implementing HRM practises in the UK, there may be shared learnings that will be beneficial to the Nigerian Oil Industry in a LR context.

This thesis reviewed the HR organisational structure that exists in the Nigerian Oil industry and how it affects organisational performance, the execution of HRM practises and whether it fosters cordial LR. This involved a review of the HR delivery structures in a Nigerian Oil Company (NOC), which is a subsidiary of a leading oil and gas multinational. To provide additional context on how HR structures affects organisations, the study also reviewed the structure in the UK affiliate with the objective of deducing shared learnings to improve the HR organisational model in the NOC. This study examined some of the LR strategies that both affiliates utilise, to evaluate their effectiveness relative to the organisational models that are in place and develop recommendations to improve LR Management in the NOC.

1.2 Rationale of the study

Organisational effectiveness (OE) has become a subject of interest within HR and consulting circles, as companies seek to evaluate how their processes complement work structures and align with the overall business objectives. Individual and collective competencies influence OE, but more importantly, how information is shared, used and how decisions are evaluated and made in an organisation. Organisational structures, departmental reporting relationships and interfaces are based on different business needs, priorities and societal context, and vary from business to business.

The HR organisational structure in the NOC has recently evolved, trying to bring it in line with the other more developed affiliates such as the UK. Therefore, while there may be some similarities in structures, as you will expect in a functionally driven multinational, there are also fundamental differences. Some of these differences are driven either by legacy structures that existed, or influenced by the socio-economic environment itself. In any case, HR structures should be able to enhance service delivery, enable strategic support to the BL and foster cordial LR in the organisation. This study therefore looked deeper into the role that HR organisational structures play in LR Management. It also reviewed the model that exists in both organisational affiliates and evaluated them within their business contexts. While there is a lot of research on HR structures to drive strategic partnership with the business, a review of its impact on LR Management is not common. Therefore, the case for identifying how HR structures improve HR practise in a highly unionised organisation is strong, as it will be beneficial for business sustainability, and provide useful input for designing HR organisations and formulating LR strategies.

1.3 Aim and objectives of the study

The HR organisation in the NOC has changed recently as it moved from the traditional HR organisation providing personnel services to one that is a combination

of embedded and specialised HR service structures. The LR function in the industry is characterised by mixed approaches, ranging from highly centralised LR approaches in organisations, to alternative decentralised approaches that empower local Managers to act with more discretion (Okolie, 2010). The Industry has also been affected by external economics and Government actions have influenced the Union's reactions to organisational changes and initiatives. As the industry changed and businesses became increasingly challenged to be more efficient, labour actions in the form of strikes or work disruptions become common. These labour challenges and how the HR organisation has grappled with them inspired this study, with the primary objective of evaluating what kind of HR organisational model will optimise LR management.

From an academic standpoint, this study looked into efficacy of HR structures on LR management, analysing differing dominant practises, ranging from more engagement with the unions as legitimate stakeholders, to more capitalist oriented views that seek to limit union influences in the workplace. A specific examination of the HR functional role in LR management was explored to determine if an optimal structure exists and how that may influence the delivery and execution of LR strategies in the workplace. This study recommended improvements to the NOC HR structures and labour strategy development.

The relationship between HR organisational structures and LR management was reviewed within the context of the Nigerian Oil Industry, and the study looked into the current trends in HR delivery models. The objective was to develop workable recommendations that are applicable in the Nigerian affiliate and add to the growing literature on this subject. To achieve this, this study looked at the recent history of LR issues and challenges faced by the NOC particularly during change events, and work situations that impact employee welfare. Understanding the Union's history, structure and their leadership and agitation strategies, was helpful in shaping a LR management strategy.

1.4 Research Questions

This study examined the relationship and interaction between HR organisational structure and LR in the Nigerian Oil Industry. There are three primary research questions targeted at investigating how the HR organisational structure affects LR management, the role of the HR Advisors in LR Management, and what kind of enhancements should be considered to improve the state of LR.

The questions in order of study importance are outlined below:

1. How does the current HR organisational structure affect LR management in the NOC?
 - Does the current HR organisational structure drive alignment with the BL?
 - Does it empower Line Managers and Supervisors to effectively manage LR in their business units?
2. What role if any, should HR Advisors have in the management of LR in a highly unionised workplace?
3. What recommended enhancements to the organisation structure and LR strategy should the NOC consider to improve LR management?

1.5 Operations and Labour Structures in the Nigerian and UK Affiliates

The NOC is the upstream subsidiary of a leading multinational Oil and Gas company, which like most other oil multinationals in the country, commenced operation in the 1950s. Upstream Oil business is managed via joint venture agreements between Oil majors and the Nigerian Government. The NOC has multiple offshore and onshore platforms spread across the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, with a number of other deep-water projects as well. Daily production has ranged from 500,000 to 700,000 barrels

a day of crude and other oil liquids, providing direct and indirect employment to over 7000 personnel. In the UK, the Corporation has operated for much longer, mainly with strong participation in the upstream operations of the UK over several decades, particularly the North Sea to predominantly more downstream operations today in Refining and Chemicals. With multiple Refinery and Chemical plants across the UK, it provides direct and indirect employment to over 10,000 personnel.

The obvious contrast in both organisations is that the Nigerian affiliate is predominantly upstream, and hence it has a bigger capital spend and geared towards upstream offshore production. In the UK, the current operation is mainly downstream so there is a lot of marketing and retail stations presence. The Nigerian affiliate has also operated for over five decades but clearly not as matured as the UK affiliate which has operated for over a century.

The Third Schedule in the Nigeria Trade Union Act (1976) recognizes two trade unions in the oil and gas sector namely, National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) representing junior non-graduate workers in the industry, and Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) which represents senior professional workers in the Industry (LFN, 2000). The two unions form branches across all oil companies and negotiate their terms and conditions of service each year.

The national unions are strong and well organized, drawing their strength from the significant role the oil and gas industry plays in the Nigerian economy. A membership rate of between 50 to 80% of the workforce is common in the Industry, as only senior Management and executive employees are excused from membership. With such a strong base of membership that has yet to decline, the influence the unions wield in the Industry and even the country as a whole is very significant. Typically, both parties negotiate and draw up a two-year working agreement with a clause for a re-opener after 12 months, and this agreement documents the recognition, scope of membership and bargaining powers of the unions on behalf of their members. Union membership cuts across all the company work locations, organised into chapters to

represent each location, and all chapters in a Company, form a Branch Executive Committee (BEC), which interfaces with senior management on collective bargaining and general labour issues within the Company.

In the UK affiliates, Union membership has been on the decline, with just about 10% of the workforce currently in the unions, comprising mainly of Technicians. They form bargaining units along the various BLs and are all affiliate members of UNITE the Union, which was formed in 2007 following a merger of the Amicus and the Transport and General Workers' Union. This Union currently represents over 3 million workers in the UK after entering into an alliance with the United Steelworkers in 2008 (Hyde and Ressaissi, 2008). The primary interaction between the organisation and the Union is mainly on wage negotiation and drawing up of triennial agreements that guide annual wage discussions on pay, hours and holidays.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

There are five chapters in this study. This first chapter provides an introduction into the study, why it is being undertaken, what the aims and objectives are, how it impacts the organisation and add new knowledge. It provides a general background on the research issues and highlights information that were examined in this case study.

The second chapter appraised the research paradigm and explored my research influences. Literature on HR Management, the nature of HR organisational structures, the practise of LR Management are all extensively reviewed, with trends and correlation to this study highlighted. The objective was to determine where literature gaps exists in how HR structures influence LR management, and link that to the development of an optimal organisational model in a unionised workplace.

Chapter three highlighted the data collection methodology used in this study and explained why and how those methods were used. The qualitative approaches

applicable to this study and their results were analysed and discussed in chapter four. In reviewing the results of the data analysis, I emphasised the linkages to prior literature and point out areas when the findings are in alignment or where they contradict existing knowledge, or generate a new phenomenon.

The final chapter summarises the conclusions from each chapter, outlines the findings that are be useable within the context of managing LR, and address the research questions identified in this study. Recommendations focused on developing a framework for optimising HR and LR Management structures to fit highly unionised workplaces in the Nigerian Oil Industry and help them better manage LR in general. These have been framed to make it pragmatically useable in improving organisational relations and effectiveness.

Chapter two Literature review

The first chapter introduced this research, highlighting the background to LR in the Nigerian Oil Industry, and articulating the study aims. The main objective of this study is to review the relationship between HR organisation structures and the management of LR. Ultimately, identifying trends and workable solutions for managing LR within the Nigerian oil industry, is the primary aim of this research. This second chapter interacts mainly with existing literature on these subjects, to highlight obvious connections with prior research and identify key issues for further review with the study findings.

The main plank of my literature review builds upon initial thoughts about HRM implementation, and its relationship with LR. Traditional personnel managers were usually adept at managing trade unions, as collective LR was prevalent in corporate environments. However, Abbott (2007) had pointed out that recent movement towards the implementation of HRM practises (which are focused on the individual employment relationship), tend to be challenging in unionised workplaces. I have certainly witnessed how difficult it can be to implement HRM practises like performance management, talent development in a unionised workplace. Reviewing literature that discusses the movement towards HRM and the experiences in managing LR was useful for this study. This involved reviewing the development of trade unionism in the UK and comparing that with the Nigerian experience, to highlight differential contexts and level of maturity, relevant to this study.

The second main aspect of the literature review looked at HR organisational structures and the key drivers for more recent trends in practise. An evaluation of how the changes in HR organisational structures impacts LR, with particular emphasis on practitioner articles to provide frontline account of these structures in practise, added appropriate context to my study. In doing this, I also briefly examined some literature of HRM and organisational performance, primarily because the linkage with performance is frequently cited as a justification for HR structural

changes. According to Taylor and Woodhams (2012), HR practise like most service functions is increasingly under pressure to justify its value to the organisation.

My search focused on both academic and practitioner articles over the last two decades, since HR Practise and LR in particular, learns deeply from history. I did however make sure that I reviewed current trends and developments in the key subject areas. Articles were mainly sourced from the University of Liverpool Online Library, using the DISCOVER and EBSCO cross database search tool for Management related subjects. Key words included Human Resources Management, Labour Relations, Industrial Relations, Organisational Performance and HR Organisational structures. I selected articles based on relevance of title/subject to my study as well as popularity. I also complemented the material with recent HR handbooks and practitioner publications from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development UK (CIPD).

2.1 HRM and Labour Relations

The relationship between HRM and LR has attracted significant interest by various researchers, primarily in trying to deduce their compatibility and how each practise impacts the other. We have already looked at how the HR practise has changed from its traditional forms focused on personnel services, to a function seeking to co-drive organisational strategy through practises like HR planning, performance management, job design and OE (Guest, 2007). LR on the other hand, refers to the rules and structures that govern workplace relations between management (including HR) and the Unions (Blackard, 2000; Siddique, 1989). The labour practises of negotiation, trade dispute, conciliation, arbitration, bargaining are all elements of the collective nature of LR. Abbott (2007) pointed out that the unitarist, individualist nature of HRM tended to be in conflict with the more collectivist nature of LR. "Industrial relations are based on the assumptions that there is an ever-present potential for conflict between competing workplace groups and therefore rules and institutions for its regulation are necessary. HRM, on the other hand is based on the

assumptions that conflict is not an inherent part of workplace relations and therefore such rules and institutions are not needed” (Ibid, p.62). This explains why some HRM strategies may imply the elimination of unionism (Kizilos and Reshef, 1997), and highlights the challenges of managing LR in the NOC that is seeking to modernise its HR practises and drive progressive HRM through the organisation. The reality is that despite the incompatibility in fundamental assumptions, HRM and LR will have to co-exist within unionised workplaces, so the relevance to this study is in understanding how one affects or improves the other, as well as the organisation.

The challenge of keeping employees fully engaged and motivated while sustaining a state of cordial LR is the main preoccupation of HR in unionised workplaces. Traditional Personnel Managers who had to manage active trade unions have overtime developed recommended practises that continue to be relevant today. However, the nature of trade unionism has evolved, changing how LR is approached today. Mores deliberate and strategic approaches have been advocated in an effort to appeal to the hearts and minds of employees. In this segment, we will review the relationship between HRM and LR practise in and correlate this with the LR experiences in the NOC.

2.1.1 Approaches to Managing LR

In a recent review of trade union membership in the UK, the CIPD (2014) affirmed the decline of trade unionism in the UK over the last three decades, but with a sustained presence in the public sector. A strong LR framework exists, backed by intricate UK and European legislation that serves to moderate the excesses of zealous unionists or over-reaching employers. This has resulted in a modest sustenance of Unionism levels, and relatively lower level of disruption compared to Nigeria. With increased employment regulation and the emphasis on values and principles by private organisations, the prospects of shared control with unions has been eroded (Machin, 1997; Terry, 2003). This is even more prominent in the Private sector, where LR based on traditional models of union cooperation has limited relevance to what

managers do today. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014), employers are now more in charge and the role of 'joint control' and 'rule-making' by employers and trade unions have been substantially replaced by employment regulation and organisational values.

Freeman and Medoff (1984) first highlighted the dual faces of labour unions, the monopolistic face where they actively compete with company management for economic resources to improve the working conditions of their members even to the detriment of the organisation. The predisposition of the Nigerian Oil Industry unions tends to be monopolistic in this sense, influenced by their post-colonial antecedents. The voice face on the other hand is more reconciliatory, and is characterised by union's active cooperation. Unions in decline challenged with the impact of increased competition on the livelihoods of their members tend to adopt this approach. Unions will always assess and promptly respond to HRM practises, but they also influence the practise of HRM by forcing HR practitioners to manage change more delicately (Taylor and Ramsay, 1998). They also empower employees to demand more from their organisations, fuelling the expectation of engagement (Beaumont, 1991).

Unionised workplaces also tend to become more formalised and adopt well documented procedures that regulate their negotiations, bargaining, consultation, discipline and dispute resolution. "Unionisation affects the competitiveness of the organisation, and for survival reasons management has no choice but to devise more effective ways of managing its employees" (Ng and Maki, 1994, p.122). The presence of collective union voice means that organisational leadership is more quickly aware of employee concerns and feedback than in non-unionised workplaces. This allows them to respond quicker to the issues raised, even if they do not necessarily agree with them. In this sense, unionization can actually be a facilitator of HRM success (Kizilos and Reshef, 1997; Kelly, 1998; Beaumont, 1991) as the unions can support organisational alignment and motivate commitment to organisational programmes by its members.

The change in the nature of LR in developed regions where union membership has declined, and the cultural shift in organisations to engage their workers actively, has meant that the practise of HRM is tending towards the commitment approach (Boselie et al (2009). This approach seeks to win the 'hearts and minds' of employees. The practise of HR, influence how employees feel about their work, and the CIPD (2014) explained that employee engagement improves employee performance and bears a strong influence on employee work satisfaction and commitment. Even in developing countries like Nigeria, where the LR regulatory structures are relatively weaker, the principles of democratic governance, dialogue and engagement has meant that the expectation of organisational and union cordial relations is increasing (Okolie, 2010). What this implies is that employees in general are now more amenable and expect active engagement by their employers and this expectation is carried through the Unions, where they exist.

In further reviewing the approaches to managing LR, Walton (1994) explained that the commitment approach includes multi-directional communication, as well as joint consultation on changes strategies with employees. This approach encourages employees to think through new prospects for the organisations such that they feel empowered to influence organisational programmes. There was a clear distinction made between traditional LR management approaches which is characterised by vibrant unionism, active collective bargaining and adversarial relations (Baird, 2002), and modern High commitment Management (HCM) HR models. These models engage a broader representation of all employees, implement progressive employee development programmes and pursue alignment through active communication. In traditional unionised workplaces, there is a stronger emphasis on rights, obligations and more frequent exercise of power in the form of management unilateral actions, or strikes/labour action by the union. It is important to note that while various research have highlighted the positive impact of HRM in the workplace as evidenced by employee retention, organisational performance and even profitability (Verma, 2005; Tsai et al, 2010), the possibility of mixed results when implementing HRM practises continues to persist. Baird's (2002) research into Australian unionised workplaces, found that commitment practises may not always work as intended and the

organisational context must be taken into account for any HRM strategy to be effective.

Rapidly changing demographics, globalisation and technology have changed the nature of the workplace, making it increasingly challenging for HR leaders to identify suitable approaches for LR management (CIPD, 2014). The commitment and control approach reviewed by Boselie et al, (2009), makes a distinction between traditional trade unionism which is more contentious, and modern forms of consultation which encouraged strategic partnerships. Where relations are contentious, Management has used this as justification for adopting a controlling stance (Deery and Purcell, 1989; Siddique, 1989), while the more moderate nature of lower union participation has opened the doors to more consultation (Blackard, 2000; Hirst, 2008). It is therefore debatable whether a management controlling stance leads to antagonistic labour relationships or vice versa. However, Townsend et al (2014) are of the opinion that a controlling stance does not result in cooperative cordial LR.

Fells (2003) went further to outline four possible approaches available to organisations when considering how LR will be managed. First, the hands-off approach, which assumes that trade union issues and LR can be outsourced. LR issues are referred to employer associations or labour lawyers, with broad negotiations or mediation handled by industrial tribunals. A strong regulatory environment and the availability of industry wide LR expertise are necessary for this model to succeed. Second, the HR Driven approach is the most common in practise, where HR organisations lead the development and execution of LR strategies. HR practitioners therefore interface with all key parties to LR in and outside the organisation. This approach leads to the internal development of LR competencies and fosters the compatibility and co-existence of HRM and LR in the workplace (Abbott, 2007). Company management is firmly in control as labour strategies are customised to meet business objectives.

The third approach known as the Frontline Management approach is more business driven, with business Managers directly leading all dealings with the Unions. This is

common in franchises or organisations with multiple small outlets or units, where Managers operate with considerable independence. The Managers may consult with specialists, available internally or externally when handling challenging situations but on a base case, they are expected to have a considerable level of expertise/experience to manage day to day LR issues. The final anti-union approach, involves managing trade union relations, either externally and/or internally but with the overall aim of eliminating the unions from the workplace. In this scenario, Managers actively discourage employees from Union participation and where there are regulatory constraints that allow unions to thrive, Management may utilize other indirect tactics to undermine union participation often with mixed results. HRM and LR are not expected to co-exist within this approach.

2.1.2 Union - Management Dynamics

Hirst (2008) attributed the development of union-management partnership to an increasingly competitive environment. Union and Management have overtime set-aside their traditional acrimonious relationship and cooperate for mutual survival when faced with the possible demise of the business. Environmental, market, social, and LR climate can affect the management propensity to innovate or the likelihood of the union to be cooperative (Kizilos and Reshef, 1997). Within the UK, consultative engagement has overtime developed as a prevailing union-management approach, which Guest and Peccei (1998), recognise as an approach founded upon a cooperative set of principles not with a formal union, but almost as a set of values communicated by the organisation to its employees. Several private companies in the UK report positive outcomes and an improvement in employee commitment as a result of the consultative approach (Haynes and Allen, 2001). In a study of unionised firms in Canada, Kizilos and Reshef (1997) found that unionisation could have a positive effect on employee response to innovative practises and organisational improvements. This is mainly in situations where they understand the organisational programmes and how it will improve overall competitiveness.

Torrington et al (2005, p477) identified the option of complete de-recognition, a form of anti-union approach also discussed by Fells (2003) where employers deliberately limit the scope of eligible employees who can join the union or the issues that can be negotiated by the Union. The emphasis here is on individual employment contracts and performance, thereby discouraging organizing tactics. In many developed societies however, some of these approaches may be legally unsustainable. “The stronger the union presence and solidarity in the organisation, the greater the union’s ability to rally the employees to respond collectively with either a competitive or cooperative focus” (Pohler and Luchak, 2013, p.2). What then influences the unions to be either cooperative or competitive within an organisation? Despite the acrimonious union posture in the Nigerian oil industry, there have also been recorded examples of the industry or Government working effectively with the unions. The recent promulgation into Law of the Nigerian Content Act (2010) is an example where the Unions played an active role in agitating for Government regulation that will drive local participation in the Oil and Gas Industry, and more closely monitor the utilisation of expatriate resources. The PENGASSAN president in recent interviews (Thisday, 2014), affirmed the union’s continued cooperation with the Government, in monitoring expatriate utilisation in the industry and reporting non-compliance.

Two broad approaches to HRM interaction with LR have been highlighted in literature, either an approach that is cooperative and seeks to increase employee commitment (Pohler and Luchak, 2013; Blackard, 2000, Kaufman, 2002) or one founded on control and union curtailment strategies (Booth, 1995, Lewin, 2001). As earlier identified, the commitment approach in HRM drives employee involvement, employee development, extensive consultation, team performance, good compensation and minimal supervision. “An organisation’s business strategy for managing its workforce, is a critical signal for the union about management’s intentions to invest in the employment relationship and engage in certain behaviours with respect to the union and its members” (Pohler and Luchak, 2013, p.6). Cooperative approaches drive employee commitment by making them an integral part of managing the business (Cabot, 2004). Conversely, the Control approach focuses on limiting union influence and membership. Research has shown that high

commitment systems tend to outperform high control systems (Pohler and Luchak, 2013). However, given the inevitability of conflict in the workplace, Townsend (2014) recommends a management practise of consultation with the union, particularly where the union influence is strong and membership is prevalent.

The presence of Unions affects management approaches to employee engagement and how the business manages change. Fell's (2003) framework for change management, highlights a management driven approach with discretionary union consultation; or a gatekeeper model, where the Union play a formal legitimate role in the change process, and serve as a gatekeeper on what may be acceptable or what will not within the organisation. Management therefore anticipates union response and tries to tailor its strategy to improve the chances of success. A hybrid Management-Union alliance model is one that is most consistent with a cooperative Internal HRM driven LR approach, where the unions are consulted in early stages of the change and they provide input and sometimes even help design the change and its execution. Because of the deeper level of engagement in this model, the union relations tend to be cordial and support for organisational programmes by employees can be higher.

Jermier et al (1994) on the other hand analysed power and resistance in organisations, and opined that such cooperative approaches can make change efforts longer, less impactful and overtime lead to erosion of the management prerogative to lead the organisation. They opined that the boundaries between management and union activism should be properly defined, and before these boundaries are defined, they will be tested. Conflict is likely but may not entirely be a bad thing if it helps set-up a sustainable working arrangement. The management responsibility to improve the organisation should not be compromised even in the face of unionism.

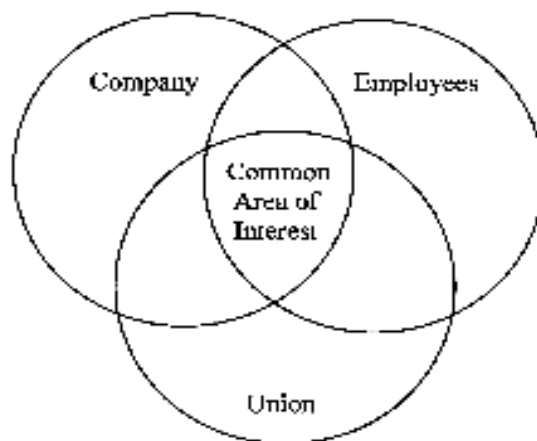
Organisational history plays a key role in the development of a LR management policy. Abbott (2007) identified several dimensions as a guide. First, the attitude towards the union whether they are recognized and allowed to actively recruit within

the organisation, determines the influence they wield and the nature of LR engagement that develops. Second, the union structure whether industrial or local determines the influence it wields. Third, how often and to what extent negotiation takes place between both parties can be a determining factor in how adversarial the relationship may be. Where bargaining scope is unduly large, negotiation can be a painful process that strains the relationship. Fourth, the presence of alternative consultative practises in the organisation is able to foster more workplace commitment, usually to the detriment of the union movement. Fifth, the structure of dispute resolution, whether well regulated or ineffective influences the attitude of both parties. The more effective it is, the more both parties will comply with labour standards and seek compromise in bargaining. Sixth, the grievance procedure, which allows employees to effectively address concerns before escalation to the union, determines how influential unions are in workplace. Where employees perceive the grievance procedures to be fair and effective, they have less need for the union. Lastly, is how LR is managed, whether internally by HR or by Business Managers directly or on an Industry basis or outsourced all together. This determines how much control management has over determining LR strategies and managing the outcomes from bargaining.

Torrington (2005, p.461) describes the consultative style of managing employee involvement as “a stage of development beyond initial trade union recognition... as employees are asked for an opinion about management proposals before decisions are made, even though the right to decide remains with management”. There is abundance of research pointing to the apparent advantages of such cooperative approaches (Hirst, 2008; Pohler and Luchak, 2013; Kaufman, 2002), yet the instinctive reluctance to adopt a consultative/cooperative approach is a highly unionised workplace by HR/Company Management must be acknowledged. This stems from the social dilemma of a second party gaining more through its selfish actions, in contrast to a more compromising action by the first party. Pohler and Luchak (2013) pointed out that mutual doubts by the union and management can develop when they are unsure about how the other party will respond if one party cooperates. In simple terms, this refers to trust between both parties to act in a

mutually beneficial manner, despite the often-conflicting direction from their stakeholders. In advocating a cooperative stance, Blackard (2000) and Barrett(1990), pointed out that there is often an overlapping area of common interest in organisational survival, competitiveness, sustainability, security and prosperity. By channelling these areas of common interest, a relationship with the union can be developed and even leveraged to make progressive organisational changes. The Union is always looking for cues on the sincerity of management intentions, and recognising this, Pohler and Luchak (2013) recommend the overt signalling of intention as a means to securing reciprocating behaviours from the Union.

Figure 1 Relationships in a Unionised workplace



Source: 'Change in a Unionized Workplace: Countervailing Collaboration' by Blackard, K (2000)

Blackard (2000) also identified five key concepts that can be adapted into the LR strategy of a unionised workplace in pursuit of cooperative relations. First, the company needs to acknowledge the likelihood of conflict with the union due to different interests. As a result, the underlying LR philosophy should be flexible, pluralistic and open to change. Second, change management procedures within the organisation should actively involve the union, with robust forms of engagement at all levels of the change, to ensure alignment with stakeholders. Third, LR management should be fully integrated in the organisation, from the HR department driving it to the BL that are implementing the strategies – Labour issues should not be addressed as

an external part of the organisation, but be integrated through organisational programmes. Fourth, the management prerogative to manage and the use of force must be retained, but used only as a last option. Primary resolution should be driven based on cooperative tactics, however it is important that all parties understand the rights of other parties. Lastly, management must take the lead in defining the union – management relationship in the organisation and signal appropriately.

According to Pohler and Luchak (2013, p.27), “Where managements intentions towards cooperation are clear, the union is more likely to reciprocate with cooperative behaviours, through exercising its discretion to use collective voice for the betterment of the organisation and creating the potential for win-win outcomes”. In their study of Canadian companies, they concluded that the potential exists for unionised workplaces to outperform non-unionised organisations where the unions are cooperative with Management, use their network and influence to drive employee action in support of organisational objectives. Although the implementation of HRM can be disruptive in a highly unionised workplace (Kizilos and Reshef, 1997), the unions are likely to support progressive initiatives if they perceive this as an opportunity to increase their influence (Ng and Maki, 1994). The countervailing cooperative approach even in conflict depicted in Figure 1 above (Blackard (2000), built on a sustainable management union alliance (Fells, 2003; Abbott, 2007) appear to hold strong prospects for the HR approach especially where the Unions are likely to thrive. The Union’s perception of management motives and actions is therefore a crucial determinant of cooperative or problematic LR in unionised workplaces. The importance of management intentions are therefore brought to fore and must be properly orchestrated to create the right impression and express positive intentions for mutual win-win outcomes.

A cooperative stance to managing LR is one that allows the organisation leverage on the availability of another employee communication channel, i.e. the union which if utilised effectively, can ensure a higher level of alignment than is available in non-unionised workplaces. In general, research into HRM and LR interrelationships, point to the significant role played by HR professionals and the HR organisation as a whole

(Hirst, 2008; Townsend et al , 2014), in developing, implementing and refining LR strategies that will improve the state of LR, thereby improving organisation performance. However, there appears to be limited research on what kind of HR organisational structures should be in place to manage LR effectively in a unionized workplace. The findings from this study provide some additional insight into these issues.

2.1.3 Trade Union Developments in the Nigerian Oil Industry

There is a long history of trade unionism in Nigeria, dating back to the colonial times in the early 20th century where the Unions were primarily concerned with Nationalisation and efficiency in the civil service (Okolie, 2010). The colonial influence led to the promulgation of the Trade Union Ordinance 1938, which was mirrored after the UK Trade Union Act of 1871. At the time, the emerging sense of liberalism in England spread across colonial territories. However, its implementation in Nigeria has been described as an attempt to recognise and address rising demand of workers, while ensuring that the colonial powers remained firmly within the control of Government and employers (Oyelere, 2014).

The agitation for national independence bolstered the labour union movement, leading to a proliferation of several industrial sector unions, which eventually in 1945 became affiliated to the Trade Union Congress of Nigerian (TUC), the first central labour organisation. Through the several decades of military dictatorship that characterised Nigeria's post-colonial polity, the Unions became an effective platform for democratic agitation (Damachi and Fashoyin, 1986). The National Labour Congress emerged as parent union body for all junior workers unions in the country, including National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas workers (NUPENG). The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), which was registered as a trade union in 1978 (PENGASSAN, 2014) became the second major oil union within the oil industry, and affiliated to TUC, the central labour organisation for the senior workers unions.

In terms of legislative development, the Nigerian Military Government promulgated the Trade Union Act 1973, seen an independent update of the colonial labour laws by a new government. This went through changes a few years later, in 1976 when the Trade Disputes (Essential Services) Act came into force, and essentially empowered the President to proscribe some trade unions as well as limit strikes in essential services. (Oyelere, 2014). The primary labour legislation in Nigeria includes the Trade Union Act 1990, which provides for the registration of trade unions and lists the Unions in its schedule (LFN, 2000). The Labour Act 1990 is another significant legislation, which seeks to regulate the nature and contract of employment and outlines mutual rights and obligations between employer and employee (LFN, 1990); the Trade Dispute Act 1990, which outlines the procedures for a labour action, the regulatory authority and processes towards resolving trade disputes (Erugo, 1998).

There were minor amendments made in 1996, 1999 and 2004. This had the effect of restricting the number of industrial unions, and more recently derecognising the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) as the sole central labour organisation, allowing the TUC to share that role for senior workers. Although the intent was to weaken the power of the unions, the reforms were not far-reaching enough to make a meaningful difference to the power relations between the Government, the Unions and Employers (George et al, 2012). In general, Nigerian labour legislation has not changed significantly in the past two decades in line with changing impact of technology, globalisation and new workplace practises. Trade Unionism and trade disputes continue to be active and prevalent within the Nigerian economy, especially in the oil and gas sector.

George et al (2012), highlight the influence of the Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA), formed in 1957 to drive a more balanced state of power relations, and foster engagement between the private sector and Government. NECA has played a key role in advocating government in protecting employer's rights but their influence overall has been limited recently, mainly because of the rather

combative nature of the Unions, the weakened state of the regulatory bodies and the political distractions of Government officials.

The clamour for better working conditions, improvements in social welfare and amenities, as well as frequent resistance to Government attempts at removing fuel subsidies, entrenched a combative predisposition within the orientation of Nigerian Unions (Fajana, 2005). By the beginning of the 21st century, National strikes due to oil industry deregulation, or the removal of subsidies by Government became common, with the oil unions taking centre stage in these actions. With the Nigerian economy still mainly dependent on its oil and gas industry for the oil export revenue, the Unions overtime achieved a significant level of national prominence as they successfully bargained for better conditions within the industry, and resisted Government or Private sector reforms that they felt were unfavourable to them. Various attempts by the democratic led Government to hike fuel prices as part of its economic reforms were met with stiff resistance by the National Unions.

Managing workplaces where Unions wielded considerable influence, determine the nature of HR practises and strategies deployed in those organisations. Trade Unionism in the private and public sector continues to be very vibrant (Okafor, 2007), with strong levels of membership motivated by weaker regulatory structures. The approach adopted by an organisation about how to manage LR will determine the organisational structure that is established (Deery, 1989; Ignace, 1994). Managing trade unions is a major priority for oil operators, as a large membership bases exists across the major companies. There is a general mix of LR approaches, with some operators perceived to be more cooperative by the Unions, while the western companies are viewed as very capitalistic.

The majority of the union members work in the National oil company, the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC, 2014), with about 10,000 employees, most of whom are unionized. Bargaining within the industry occurs at an organisational level and has been for over two decades, and there are various levels of union-HR collaboration within the Industry necessary as part of the drive towards cooperative

LR (Fajana, 2005; Fells, 2003; Abbott, 2007). However, this history is chequered with a lot of conflict. The National Union and their various zonal or local branches have led various forms of labour action including full production strikes over wages, deregulation, security, employment security, Government change programmes, divestment or investment plans by operators and contractor services (Turner and Brownhill, 2004; Ihonvbere, 1997; Okafor, 2007). Formulating a LR strategy will continue to be a challenge given the complicated nature of the industry and strong linkages with the Government.

There is also the issue of social culture, with Nigerian workers often expecting their employers to be more paternalistic and care for their livelihoods outside the workplace. This is typical in an emerging economy, where the Government continues to be a major employer and regulates industries closely with the objective of protecting employment and promoting a more social agenda. Anakwe (2002) identified the following four key characteristics about the Nigerian workplace, which multinationals need to take into account in formulating their LR strategies. "Nigeria's cultural characteristics suggest that: (1) employees' tendencies would reflect a collectivist orientation which entails conformity and identification with an in-group, which in this case could include the organisation, the extended family and other work and non-work affiliations; (2) employees' tendencies would be consistent with a high power distance culture; (3) employees would expect organisations and managers to be responsible for their welfare, provide more nurturing relationships by instituting policies and practises that ensure quality of life; and (4) employees would need some structure and guidelines to execute job demands" (Ibid, p.1055)

The industry also witnessed number of mergers and acquisitions as businesses consolidated globally to become more integrated across Upstream, Downstream and Midstream segments (Weston et al, 1999). As local labour practises became harder to justify in an increasingly globally connected business place, so did LR gradually became more challenging to manage as employees channelled their anxieties through the union. The labour strike actions that dominated the last two decades within the Nigerian economy were mostly linked to demands for social programs such

as maintenance of subsidies, provision of social benefits, and general resistance against privatisation (Okolie, 2010). This context is very relevant when pondering the nature of HR practises to drive, and how to approach LR in the Nigerian workplace. This study examined the coping mechanisms of the NOC within this environment, and assesses how this cultural context was taken into account in structuring the HR delivery system and the LR strategies.

2.1.4 Comparative State of Labour Relations in the UK

The early 20th century, saw the predominance of voluntary recognition of collective agreements and Unions, in British workplaces, as well as minimal formal labour structures (Bryson, 2007). Industrialization led to the unionisation of skilled craft workers, and by the 1960, white-collar workers had also joined the Unions. The political movement at the time was positively disposed to union movement and developments, as the quest for decent jobs was the acceptable aspiration (Nowak, 2015). Union membership exceeded 12 million with a density of over 50% by 1979 and the state of organisational relations was no longer conducive for business. The unbridled growth of the Unions, who wielded significant influence in the Government polity came to a head with the high number of strikes experienced under a Labour government and the economic decline that subsequently set in by the late 1970s.

The Conservative Thatcher Government which came into power in 1979 progressed significant reforms which included privatising Government enterprises as well as reforms of the labour laws to restore some balance in the power relations in British workplaces. The recession had significantly affected Union membership levels due to massive job losses and high unemployment. Key elements of the Labour Reforms, which still subsist today, include the abolition of statutory recognition, limiting closed Union shops, require pre-strike ballots, extended individual rights against a Union, and strengthened the right of employers to secure injunctions against a Union. The Government also reformed the benefit and welfare system to drive employment and make it more difficult to secure benefits, eliminate wage councils, reduce government

regulation and red tape, and lower business taxes (Blanchflower and Freeman, 1993).

These reforms were not without significant challenges for the British Government. The Winter of discontent, where Union leaders lost control over their members and as a result, multiple indiscriminate strikes were declared and this eventually led to the fall of the Labour Government (Bryson, 2007). The Miner's Strike from 1984 to 1985 was also a significant event, as the Government's plans to close Mine pits was resisted by the National Union of Miners for about a year. Eventually, the Unions conceded, handing the Conservative Government a significant victory and marking a major shift in power relations in the Country (Peter, 1988). The effect of these reforms led to a balanced state of organisational power relations in the workplace. Privatisation led to a significant decline in Union membership, and the creation of enabling government regulation and effective arbitration and dispute resolution mechanisms, blunted the radicalism in Trade Unionism. "Trade Unions have had to get to grips with the decline of manufacturing and the rise of the service sector, the acceleration of globalisation, international competition and technological change; a greater role for the private sector in the delivery of public services and goods; more women and migrants entering the workforce; and the gradual hollowing out of the labour market; with more jobs at the top, fewer in the middle and many more at the bottom" (Nowak, 2015, p.684)

Another major influence on Labour developments in the UK was the membership of the European Union in 1973, which resulted in advancement of employment rights and workplace consultation practices. Key legislation changes from the EU include working time regulations, family and parental leave rights, agency worker regulations, information & consultation amongst others (Cushway, 2014). The recent defeat of UNITE the Union in the strike it called at INEOS, a Chemical plant in Scotland, is an example of the state of power relations in the UK today. Faced with the threat of plant closure and a massive loss of jobs for its members, UNITE was forced to retreat and concede on pay freezes, no strike clauses and pension reforms (Darlington and Dobson, 2015). This was made possible by the historical pro-business legislative

changes which has limited union power in UK workplaces. The current Conservative Government remains keen to keep Union power in check as the current legislative agenda of the David Cameron's Government in 2015 include plans to further limit Unions ability to strike, and renegotiate the UK's position in Europe. In contrast, HRM and other progressive business practices will continue to be a challenge to implement in the Nigerian workplace, due to its limited political enforcement of appropriate balance.

2.2 HR Organisational Structures and Labour Relations

The structure of HR organisations is typically driven by the nature of business they support and the strategy in place to meet business objectives (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014). The combination of HR systems, processes, structures, strategies, policies and practises otherwise known as the HR architecture serve the purpose of delivering on the objective of managing people optimally to meet those objectives. Huselid (1995) had highlighted the importance of getting the HR systems right as this was a clear determinant of organisational performance, while Ulrich (1996) had seen this as a key competitive advantage for the organisation. The impact of technology, changing demographics, globalisation and growing economics, have over time changed the traditional HR function and what the business expects from HR (Swift, 2010). The practise of HR has as a result, moved from Personnel Management and LR functions to a more strategic form of HRM which seeks to align and co-drive business strategy (Marchington, 2008). HR structures have also evolved, further fuelling the debate about structuring organisations based on a set of best practises, or a customisation of those practises to find the best fit for the organisation.

2.2.1 HRM Configurations and Performance

Following an increased emphasis on providing strategic solutions and measuring HR's impact on business performance, the HR role has evolved from one that was concerned with providing personnel services to a function that partners with the

business and improves OE. “In order to succeed, HR must be a business driven function with a thorough understanding of the organisation’s big picture and be able to influence key decisions and policies” (Albu, et al, 2009, p.134). As globalisation and technology change the face of business, so have leaders increasingly demanded more from their supporting service functions including HR. The dominance of key performance indicators (KPIs) and performance metrics that seek to measure tangible contributions has increased pressure on service groups to become more efficient and innovate to remain relevant. Ulrich et al (2008) highlighted how traditionally, HR contributions were measured by the quantity of activities, for example, training attendance, benefits processed, number of employees hired or separated. However, these metrics are transactional and are no longer good indicators of incremental value. HRM facilitates “changes in job design, skill enhancement, employee involvement in decision-making, teamwork gain and profit sharing, pay for skill, improved labour-management communication, and a more collaborative managerial style (Kizilos and Reshef, 1997,p.641). Today, businesses seek HR's impact on issues like cultural change, promoting diversity, employee commitment, production processes, firm leadership branding, enhancing product quality, managing people issues in mergers and acquisitions to name a few.

There is an abundance of literary assertions about how HR practises strongly linked to corporate strategy improve organisational performance. Authors like Boselie et al (2005), Schuler (1992) , Paauwe & Boselie (2005), advocate a clear alignment in what the HR organisation is driving and overall business objectives. Huselid (1995) demonstrated the linkages between HRM and performance and identified a distinction in the nature of organisational fit. External fit refers to the integration of HRM practise with organisational strategy taking into consideration external business factors such as the competitive climate, legislation impact and even issues like employee relations/unionisation. Internal fit, refers to the implementation of high performance HRM practises, which include selection and workforce development, training and competency management, performance management, employee reward and recognition amongst others. While there is no consensus on what these HRM practises should be, there are generally common themes across most studies.

The Internal fit view which is also supported by Guest (2011) links the implementation of these HRM practises to other organisational performance factors like productivity, labour turnover and financial measures. The third view, known as the Configurational Fit, implies the implementation of HRM by 'bundles', where organisations combine various set of HR practises to fit their strategic needs. These views on the customization of HRM practises rather than a wholesome adoption of prescribed best practises is of interest to this study, when you consider the implementation of HRM practises in a highly unionised work environment. The arguments made by Becker et al (1997) , Guest (1997) is that configurational adoption is driven by value an organisation places on certain people issues. However, it was inconclusive that this customisation was necessarily a better or worse approach than the widely popular internal fit approach that advocated implementing generally acceptable high performance HRM practises.

It is important to point out that Guest (1997) had challenged the quick conclusions about improved performance, explaining that in a lot of cases, proponents mainly focused on any or all of the four main areas of HRM practises namely, selection, training and development, rewards and careers. They do this too simplistically, without expanding on the process by which HRM enhances organisational performance. His sceptic view is that popular HRM practises are also implemented in organisations that are not consciously driving an organisational strategy. Traditionally, these practises have happened because they were considered the usual business of HR. What this demonstrates, is that it is not necessarily the presence of a certain set of HRM practises that makes the difference, but rather how they are integrated and executed within the organisational context (ibid, p273). Along these lines, Melián-González & Verano-Tacoronte (2006) agreed with the assertions that it is possible to approach HRM as a combination of desirable practises without all of them being best practises, as external factors such as legislation and collective bargaining influence the choice of HR practise to apply. They referred to work done by Lepak and Snell (1999) to outline HR configurations based on the value of human

capital to the organisation and uniqueness of the human capital resources to the organisation as adapted in Table 1 below:

Table 1 HR Configurations Considerations

Value of Human Capital Resources====>	Acquire Human Capital resources from market & other competitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutually beneficial employment relationship • HR Configuration should be market-based 	Develop Human Capital resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An organisational focused employment relationship, typically tailored towards long-term employment • HR configuration that drives long-term commitment and employee engagement
	Contract Human Capital resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment relationship should mainly be transactional, fill needs when required no long term commitments required • HR configuration should mainly be hinged on driving compliance with contracts, policies and legislation 	Create Human capital alliances, with shared responsibility on developing required resources to optimise costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment relationship will be varying mode of partnerships • HR configuration should be internally & externally collaborative
	Uniqueness of Human Capital Resources====>	

Adapted from Lepak and Snell (1999), The human resource architecture.

The uniqueness of human capital and the need to intricately consider this within the overall organisational strategy when determining which HRM approach to adopt, highlights how difficult it is to achieve a consensus when debating the relationship between HRM and performance. The quest for measuring performance within the application of HRM must also be balanced with the dualities and paradoxes that HRM often present. Boselie et al (2009) articulated these in a series of studies into how to manage some of these dualities. Notably, the distinction of HRM from Personnel Management (PM) and Industrial Relations, are hinged on a longer outlook in HRM, with strong emphasis on employee commitment, the promotion of employee relations

that is mutually cooperative, and a shift from control to employee commitment as a way to promote organisational relations.

In its best form, HRM is intended to be progressive and hence improve organisational performance, but this is not without some contrasting approaches as well. According to Szilas (2014), the 'soft Harvard approach' to HRM as an example, seeks development of the organisation as a whole and the promotion of multiple long-term organisational goals that includes factors like individual and social wellbeing. Conversely, the 'hard Michigan approach' to HRM adopts a more strategic shareholder perspective and hinges on employee incentives for example, performance based pay to sustain motivation and performance. The distinction in these differing HRM approaches will affect how outcomes are measured and invariably how overall organisational performance impact is perceived by the business. The duality in a sense adds to the non-consensual nature of HRM impact on organisational performance overall. Although we can deduce common themes, reaching a consistent framework for how to drive or measure organisational performance using HRM may continue to be a challenge.

In general, while there is no consensus on a universal set of acceptable HRM practises, there are common themes around career development, training, employee engagement and motivation. Research suggests that it is important to customise these practises to suit organisational situations (Guest, 1997; Boselie et al, 2005; Guest, 2007), and the application of HRM as bundles may be a more common practise than acknowledged. Second, there is some acceptance in literature about the association of HRM with improved organisational performance. However, clarity about how that performance improvement is driven by HRM is not clearly defined or universally accepted. There are however, clear benefits in the alignment of HRM strategy with organisational strategy, and these can lead to good employee outcomes and hence improve organisational performance. Third, employee engagement is a strategy for improving organisational performance (Guest, 2007; Anderson, 2007). HRM practises designed for shared implementation by HR and BL seek to increase levels of employee engagement and therefore performance. In the

context of this study, it can be argued that if the HR organisation changes and LR strategies can result in an increase in employee engagement, then the likelihood of improved business alignment and performance is increased.

2.2.2 Best Fit versus Best Practise

Taylor and Woodhams (2012) explained the arguments that there are certain sets of HR practises that will invariably lead to better performing results. These best practise views re-echoed by various authors (Huselid, 1995; Thompson, 1998) argue that high commitment HR practises such as selection methods, employee engagement, training and development, talent management, performance reward systems all tend to improve organisational performance. Sometimes, these practises can be combined into bundles to optimally suit the organisation, but invariably, they all point to the universality of HR practise based on links to organisational performance. These views have however been challenged, particularly the rationale for universal fit when in fact HR systems and practises should be tailored to suit the organisational context, hence finding the best fit.

“What is needed are HR policies and practises which ‘fit’ and are thus appropriate to the situation of individual employers. What is appropriate (or best) for one will not necessarily be right for another” (Taylor and Woodhams, 2012, p.13). Clearly, the business context based on the products, people, priorities, and locations will drive what kinds of HR strategies are deployed. “The search for bundles of high commitment work practises is important, but so too is the search for understanding of the circumstances of where and when it is applied, why some organisations do and others do not adopt HCM, and how some firms seem to have more appropriate HR systems for their current and future needs than others” (Purcell, 1999, p.36). The whole case for the formulation of HR strategies rest upon the premise of promoting business, and while tried and tested methods are good starting points, HR needs to be designed for the business not forced into the business.

The claims to universality of HR practises, structures and models have been described as premature and not a guarantee of organisational success (Richardson and Thompson, 1999). With the evolutionary nature of HR practise, it is prudent to continually evaluate what works well in which situation and build learnings from those experiences into practise. “The claim that the bundle of best practise HRM is universally applicable leads us into utopian cul-de-sac and ignores the powerful and highly significant changes in work employment and society visible inside organisations and in the wider community” (Purcell, 1999, p.36). He affirmed that we should be more concerned about trying to manage change in HR and in our organisations such that we are continually improving the service provided and the organisational outcomes that are prioritised. Marchington (2008) was more critical expressing concerns at the HRM practise becoming uni-dimensional by trying to align with a consensual set of best practises, or superficial by relying on popular measures/metrics which add limited value to the organisation. In doing so, he envisaged a situation where HR becomes more disconnected from its customers and the core of people management, as it fail to pay attention to organisational change needs and how Line managers are putting HRM into practise.

Adaptation of HRM best practises is the key to long-term sustainable performance, views which were re-echoed by Armstong and Taylor (2014). The changing nature of business, with increased competition, changing demographics, increased diversity, flexibility needs, all pose new challenges and opportunities for HR. Machington (2008) recommended a reconnection with the core principles of employee engagement and advocacy, where organisational contingency is taken into account and HR prioritise change management. Relating this to how HR executes LR, Guest (2007), Schuler (1999) and Blackard (2000) were all emphatic about the need to develop an internally considerable LR strategy backed by HR programmes and policies that drive employee engagement, work motivation and address domestic challenges. This clearly suggests that a HR driven LR strategy based on acclaimed best practises without consideration for local labour related nuances will be suboptimal.

2.2.3 HR Delivery Systems

Linked to the debate about what combination of HR practises to adopt within an organisation, is the consideration about how HR will be delivered. Different HR organisational structures or models have been used over the years, a testimony perhaps to the changing nature of HR practise and the differentiating nature of its application in different businesses. Swift (2010) highlighted the two dominant models of HR service delivery in organisations today, which include the more traditional approach of maintaining a group of generalists, specialists and other administrative support personnel within the same team structured by location or corporate business unit. Alternatively, the 'three-legged stool' model of business partners, shared services and centres of expertise which was made popular by Ulrich (1997) and had been adapted into various forms with mixed reviews from practitioners and academics alike. According to Ulrich (1996, p.3), the "key elements in developing HR's increasingly strategic role include establishing an organisational architecture to implement the company's strategy, aiding in an organisational diagnosis and helping to prioritise various initiatives". Three distinct HR delivery roles are highlighted in Ulrich's (1997) model:

- **HR Business Partners:** These roles are experienced HR Professionals who are embedded or work closely with the BL to drive organisational strategy, serve as an internal resource to guide Managers on employee relations and people planning issues. The CIPD (2014) identified the following HR activities that business partners will likely get involved in:
 - People planning, capability development and organisational staffing
 - Talent and succession planning
 - Change management practises, with emphasis on employee engagement and communication
 - Improvements in people management practises
 - Strategic HR planning and advising line management appropriately
 - Industry and HR practise monitoring, employee trends analysis, provision of strategic HR intelligence for use in organisational development

There is no exclusive or exhaustive list of activities that business partners will do. It tends to be different from one organisation to another. In general, they will support change management initiatives, be adept at listening to the organisation and developing people solutions and also serve as interface between the BL and the rest of the HR service delivery systems (Swift, 2012; Pritchard, 2010). The challenges associated with this role has to do with retooling HR professionals for generalist consulting, managing team relations between embedded teams and the rest of the HR service systems, ensuring seamless interfaces and ensuring consistency in practises across different business groups.

- **Shared Services:** provide support to other parts of the HR systems by handling transactional backend services, such as payroll, HR accounting, benefit processing (Swift, 2012). This became increasingly popular as globalisation and technology enabled businesses to provide services from lower cost locations and on a larger scale.
- **Centres of Expertise:** these are usually a team of HR specialists or experts grouped together to provide specialised solutions to both the HR organisation and the BL. They are usually structured along innovative lines to support organisation effectiveness, learning or talent management. (Taylor and Woodhams, 2012). They could also be structured to provide specialised services like Pension Management, employment Law or Executive compensation.

The business partner role plays a crucial piece in connecting the HR organisation with the BL. There is also implied within this a critical employee relations responsibility, which in a nutshell is the ability to diagnose people issues within their client groups early – including general concerns that require further engagement and robust communication. In examining the nature of the Business Partner role, Barney and Wright (1997, p.44) stated that “the ultimate quest should be for the HR function to provide the firm with resources that provide value, are rare, and cannot be easily imitated by other organisations. This quest entails developing employees who are

skilled and motivated to deliver high quality products and services, and managing the culture of the organisation to encourage teamwork and trust. It also requires that HR functions focus more attention on developing coherent systems”

Interestingly, a major criticism of the Ulrich’s 3 legged stool model is the disconnect it creates between management and employees. HR is accused of abandoning its traditional employee advocacy role and catering instead to the needs of senior management, with a one-sided emphasis on organisational performance (Marchington, 2008). Additionally, in the change towards the 3 legged stool model, HR organisations emphasised the development of key competencies such as talent management, change management, people planning and consulting (Anderson and Taylor, 2014), with insufficient emphasis placed on Employee engagement and LR. Most organisations have continued to maintain specialist teams to handle employee relations and LR (Taylor and Woodhams, 2012), and the interface between these specialist teams and the frontline Business partners is not explicitly clear.

Hird et al (2009) pointed out a possible misapplication of Ulrich’s views by HR practitioners. They explained that Ulrich (1997) had applied the business partner concept to all key HR deliverables, which include strategy execution, administrative efficiency, employee contribution and capacity for change. He was not prescriptive about the nature of HR structures that should be put in place, but rather focused more on how HR is delivered. A crucial insight provided by Hird et al (2009) links the delivery of HR to the value question. They opined that there are 3 broad definitions of value, and modes of HR delivery should only be determined after identifying the key value priorities which typically will be one or two areas but not all three. First, Upstream value creation, which is where HR finds, develops and retains talents, helps builds processes that ensures the transfer of knowledge and links those processes to measurable organisational performance. Second, Downstream value creation which is more concerned with preserving value and ensuring that there are effective control and governance processes in place, with sustainable continuous improvement. Lastly, cross-organisational value which is concerned with the whole

organisation and how HR delivers value across boundaries, and sustains the connection across the organisation.

Sparrow and Miller (2013) identified six issues which HR organisations need to consider when designing the appropriate HR organisational structures, with emphasis on delivering organisational value and improving HR business partnering:

- “Understanding the way the whole partnering network operates to inform HR choice
- Supporting partnership arrangements needs to be a core HR capability
- Differentiating the level of strategic HR support between arrangements
- Designing HR to deal with crisis situations
- Developing leadership for the network
- Dealing with the issue of employees’ dual identity” (Ibid, p.3)

According to the CIPD (2014), the Ulrich’s (1997) model can sometimes create functional silos in HR organisations, and HR business partners may be constrained in handling employee relations issues because of their reporting structures, even when they are better placed to handle the situation. Pritchard (2010) in his research into how HR organisations handle the change to strategic partnering, highlighted the risk of an identity crisis suffered by HR advisors. They are often unsure of how to interface with other HR functions and what partnership with the business means. They struggle to let go of their traditional areas of expertise and boundary overlaps quickly become problematic. “First, the research highlights the need for a focus on how different groups of HR practitioners interpret changes to organisations and roles. Second, it points to the need to pay attention to how these groups (both within and without the HR department) will work together moving forward – above and beyond an attention to HR policies and procedures. Third, it suggests more attention to the ongoing experience of change, and perhaps that the HR department is at risk of not practising what it preaches in the broader context of organisational change” (Pritchard, 2010, p.186). For some of these reasons, the CIPD (2014) cautions

against an overly prescriptive adoption of the model and encourages hybrid customisation to fit business needs.

Swift (2012), presented common variants gathered from a 2007 CIPD research into how the business partner approach has been applied differently across organisations:

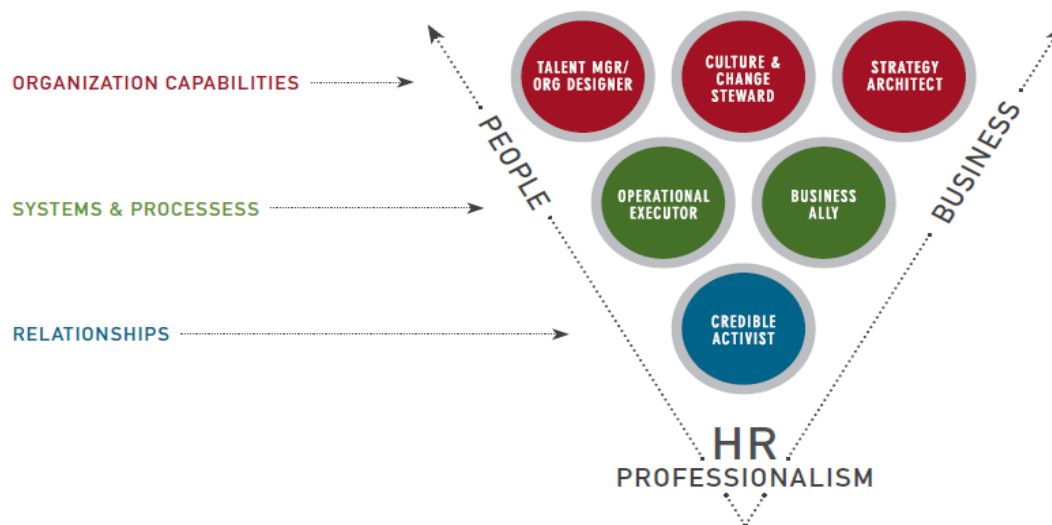
Table 2 Variants of the '3 Legged Stool' HR Organisational Structures

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Business Partners +Shared Services - No Centres of Expertise 	<p>Self-contained HR Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Led by Business Partner +Support shared services +Policy/Strategy Unit -No Centres of Expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Corporate HR Unit +Internal Shared Services Unit +Business Unit with general rather than dedicated Business partners -No Centres of Expertise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Business Partners +Shared Payroll Services +Centres of Expertise -No Shared Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Business Partners +Policy Unit +Learning Units +Development design Unit +Call Center +Case management group +Shared Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Business Partners +Learning & Development Unit +Embedded HR Advisors +Corporate Services Unit +Strategy consultancy group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Business Partners +Shared Services +Centres of Expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Business Partners +Advisory call centre +Global Shared Services +Regional/Global COE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Business Partners +Regional Admin Service Centres +Call centres +Local Payroll +Core HR Strategy & Delivery teams -No Centres of Expertise

Variants of the 3 legged stool, adapted from The Changing HR Function -Transforming HR by Reilly P, Tamkin P, Broughton (2007) A CIPD publication

The implications of a rapid change in HR delivery structures is that the HR professionals need to be re-tooled for modern businesses. Ulrich et al (1995) reviewed the business environment impact on HR practise and the competences required to remain relevant. They outlined six competency domains for HR advisors and pointed out the need for rounded development for professionals to suit the business need for their roles.

Figure 2 HR Competency Model



From Ulrich, D., Brockbank, W., Yeung, A. K., & Lake, D. G. (1995). Human resource competencies: An empirical assessment. *Human Resource Management*, 34(4), 473-495.

According to Ulrich et al (1995), first as a *credible activist*, HR is believable and champions progressive organisational changes. Second, as a *culture and change steward* with good understanding of the business environment and the social, cultural nuances, HR is better positioned to advise on how best to progress necessary changes. Third, as *talent Managers/organisational designers*, HR plays a key role in sourcing and developing key organisational skills necessary for long-term sustainability. Fourth, the *strategy architect* competency highlights the need to be able to understand organisational vision and actively participate in strategy development. Fifth, is the *Operational executor* role, where HR is focused on providing efficient, effective services. Lastly, the *Business ally* role, partnering with the business to identify key opportunities and threats and how to respond to them. These competencies are new and continuously evolving as HR practitioners increasingly adapt their application to the needs of the business and ever present pressure of adding value in measurable terms. The general deduction from literature is that there is still a gap in where HR competencies are today, and where they need to be to add value to modern businesses.

2.3 Literature Review Summary

A review of key labour legislation in Nigeria showed that not much has changed in two decades in response to the impact of globalisation, technology and new workplace practises. Trade disputes continue to be prevalent in the Nigerian economy, especially in the oil and gas sector. Mergers and combinations have led to the adoption of more disciplined management practises, which further aggravated the state of LR. Unions who are used to traditionally paternalistic nature of organisations were often resistant to these changes. Two broad approaches to HRM interaction with LR have been highlighted in literature, either an approach that is cooperative and seeks to increase employee commitment (Hirst, 2008; Pohler and Luchak, 2013; Blackard, 2000, Kaufman, 2002), or an approach founded on union curtailment (Booth, 1995, Lewin, 2001).

Trade Unionism is in different stages of development between Nigeria and the UK. Historical legislative and Government changes in the 70s and 80s have led to a reduction in Union Power and created a more balanced state of LR in the UK, with relatively less conflicts and strikes (Blanchflower and Freeman, 1993). In Nigeria however, the Unions played a key role in resisting previous Military Governments and contributing to the democratic movement. They therefore wield significant power, particularly as regulatory conciliation and arbitration structures are weak (Okolie, 2010). The Oil industry in particular remains very highly unionised and the power dynamics within companies make change initiatives more challenging to implement.

This chapter reviewed the impact of HRM organisational practices on employee engagement, and indirectly to performance, and there was no consensus on a universal set of acceptable HRM practises. Research suggests that it is important to customise these practises to suit organisational situations (Guest, 1997; Boselie et al, 2005; Guest, 2007), but there is still some uncertainty about how exactly HRM practises improve business performance. This study therefore presented an opportunity to identify which HRM practises are likely to promote employee

engagement, and foster cordial LR. HRM practises wrongly applied may exacerbate the state of LR. It was therefore important for the study to deduce what set of HRM practises can improve LR and which have proven effective in highly unionised workplaces.

There is abundance of research pointing to the apparent advantages of cooperative approaches, yet the instinctive reluctance to adopt a consultative/cooperative approach in a highly unionised workplace by business leaders must be acknowledged. Overall, it is deducible from available research that the cooperative stance to managing labour relationships can create the right environment for the Union to become positive business partners. It has been argued that the possibly improvement in employee engagement in such a cooperative scenario may lead to a higher level of alignment than is available in non-unionised workplaces. This study examined the approaches to LR within the organisation, and evaluated the differing practises to identify a possible trend in how cooperative versus coercive approaches impact the state of LR.

The structures of HR organisations have also changed, with various adaptations of the Ulrich (1997) three legged stool model now common. This model is associated with efficiency and more strategic contribution of HR to the BL (Swift, 2010; Armstrong and Taylor, 2014; Ulrich, 1997). It has also been criticised for alienating employees by focusing mainly on senior management and relegating the traditional HR role of employee advocacy (Marchington 2008; Hird et al, 2009). According to Pritchard (2010), HR business partners are often ill prepared for their new roles as strategic consultants and may lack the competencies required to successfully implement this model. There is also some gap in literature about what delivery model is optimal for a highly unionised workplace like the NOC. This study evaluated the current delivery model in the NOC and developed recommendations for consideration in such unionised workplaces.

For organisations adopting the three-legged stool model, the change management processes must be properly executed to drive team alignment and deliver an

outcome that fits the organisational need. These structural and strategic changes necessitate the development of new HR competencies. Consulting, employee relations, change management, organisational development are just some of new emerging competencies to meet modern business needs (Ulrich, 2013). What is less obvious from available literature is how HR personnel adapt to these changes that are fostered on them in a unionised workplace context. What kind of HR delivery models will enhance workplace cordial relations with a strong and vibrant union? How does HR organise itself to manage the Union, fulfil base services and still play a key strategic role to the business? These are some of the unanswered questions deducible from the literature review in relation to this research. This study therefore evaluated these issues closely in the NOC, assessed the structural effectiveness of the HR organisation and the HR competencies that exist, compared practises with the UKOC, identified the key elements of union behaviour and developed a model that will optimize the relationship for improved business performance.

Chapter three Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed literature within various aspects of this study. The relationship between HRM and its impact on organisational performance was explored, and while a strong interrelationship can be deduced, its actual mechanism of action on performance and in particularly LR is still uncertain. The concept of cooperative LR is an obvious line of action in an organisational context where union membership is prevalent, active and has legislative backing. Management must however strike the balance between maintaining its right to manage and embracing the idea of the Union as a business partner. Various approaches exist in literature on how to foster cooperative LR. Pohler and Luchak (2013) expressed the importance of management intent, while the practise of countervailing collaboration was strongly advocated by Blackard (2000). In all, the application of HRM in a unionised workplace will continue to be challenging in the near-term and justifies an innovative review of LR strategies.

HRM practises have evolved, with traditional personnel management giving way to embedded HR business partnerships and global efficient service centres that all collaborate to deliver solutions. While there is abundant literature about this change and what it means for the HR function, there is a rather limited perspective about what kind of organisational structures can facilitate cooperative LR. We had earlier reviewed opinions of how cordial LR can lead to improved organisational performance especially where the union is strong and cooperative. This leads into the investigative part of this study, which looks into how organisational structures impact LR management. This chapter describes and justifies the methodology used for this investigation. It explains the data collection methods that were used and explains the selection of the respondents.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A key element that needs to be properly articulated and understood in any research is the paradigm within which the research is undertaken. This in simple terms is the set of assumptions, values and approaches that the researcher used in trying to find relationships between the research variables. Van Maanen (1995) described this as a set of universal principles that drive what is being studied, how it is studied and how the results are interpreted. Weaver and Olson (2006, p. 460) explained this as “patterns of beliefs and practises that regulate inquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which the investigation is accomplished”. Given the highly social and interactive nature of this inquiry, which evaluated HR structures and LR management, it was important to understand my paradigms, and how those assumptions eventually impacted the structure of this study and the methodological approaches that were adopted.

There have been two primary perspectives on research paradigms that have dominated academic research, Positivism and Interpretivism. Positivism has been described as the scientific method mainly because knowledge is created through discrete, scientific methods that are replicable and emphasise logic, facts, certainty, and verification (Holt and Thorpe, 2008, p.155-6). It is hinged on the principles of absolute prediction and validation, as it argues that there is only one verifiable objective reality (Weaver and Olson, 2006; Wahyuni, 2012). The emphasis on validation in effect means that the quantitative methodological approach holds strong sway within this paradigm. Repeated testing, quantification and validation of results and application to discrete variables are expected within this paradigm.

The emphasis on sacredness of nature and reality in Positivism is a challenge within a research of this nature that is highly interactive and dependent on the influences of multiple social actors such as the Union, the Nigerian Oil Industry, and employees. The primary limitation of a positivist view is that “reality cannot be represented in some proportionally pure form that is untouched by the context of meaning in which it

is embedded” (Holt and Thorpe, 2008, p.157). Hussain et al (2013) characterised these criticisms as a disregard for the subjectivity and influence of the actors within the research. Human behaviour is not passive neither is it entirely predictable or determinable. The nature of LR is driven by the multiple actors that influence and interact with each other. The business strategies determine how an organisation manages its trade unions, and to what extent it empowers its frontline Managers to deal with employee concerns and agitation. The subjective nature of LR and the manner in which it manifests through the actions and influences of multiple actors makes it appropriate within an interpretative research paradigm, which is social and driven by personal interpretations of reality.

The Interpretive approach acknowledges the multiplicity of paradigms in knowledge creation and how comprehension and respondent action can be influenced. “All constructivism stands on preferring the imaginative self, rather than on realist notions of the self as a passive but impressionable observer” (Holt and Thorpe, 2008,p.57). Van Maanen (1995) called for influencing through literary discourse while acknowledging the intricacies of the real social world. While the scientific method is indeed helpful in validation and triangulation, I hold a fundamentally interpretive orientation as I believe that the interactions of the research actors affect their viewpoints of reality and how they make sense of it.

As a HR Practitioner with over 12 years’ experience in the Oil Industry in Nigeria, Europe and the Middle East, I have been influenced by how intricate and unpredictable human behaviour is, particularly employee behaviours and how the application of various motivational and managerial approaches have produced different results in different contexts. My early experiences were in the Nigerian Oil Industry, working in various HR roles, which included service-oriented roles in Compensation, Benefits and HR planning; and HR embedded roles, which included Industrial Relations Advisor, as well as the HR Manager of a major operational site. In these roles, I interfaced directly with the union, chairing a number of consultative meetings between the Union and the Company, and playing a lead HR supporting role in annual wage negotiations. I have therefore witnessed my share of LR

challenges, and have managed very difficult situations involving the Union. There have also been numerous situations where we have collaborated with the union and achieved mutually beneficial outcomes. I therefore have a good sense of respect for the Union and what they stand for, I actually find those intense bargaining situations challenging and exhilarating as well. I have also seen the Union adopt rather negative tactics, all with the objective of getting what they want. My feelings towards the existing of unions is therefore mixed, respect for what they can often achieve and sceptical about their intentions as well.

I gained further International HR experiences, which included working assignments in the Middle East in designing and implementing Pension and savings plans, as well as HR labour and embedded roles in UK Downstream oil sector where I supported various Chemical and Refinery plants across the UK/Europe. I have gained a wide spectrum of experiences across very developed and still developing HR organisations, which made me understand the importance of implementing fit-for-purpose HR programs based on key local business context. This orientation influenced my pursuit of this study.

Working in a highly unionised environment like Nigeria, where there are many interests to be navigated in resolving a labour issue had reinforced my interpretive approach to reality. Rather than adopt a paradigm because of how it is described, I have learned to form my opinions based on my own interactions with reality, and by reflecting upon those interactions and how the data and underlying assumptions are influencing the research. I do not fundamentally believe that the knowledge paradigms are incompatible, and support the views shared by Jackson & Carter (2001) and Van Maanen (1995), in denouncing attempts to synthesize the paradigms into one coherent view, rather than welcoming the diversity which arguably, can lead to more knowledge. Within the context of HR practise and managing LR, I have learned over time to allow myself be in the moment, and be influenced by the discourse, the context and the dynamics that the situation presents. Practicing reflexivity within those situations has helped me learn more about the issues, about

the actors and even about myself. I am therefore predominantly interpretative and applied this paradigm to the study.

Holt and Thorpe (2008, p.184-185) had identified introspective reflexivity which focuses on the researcher self-thinking about his actions; methodological reflexivity, which is more technically oriented and focuses on reviewing the methods used in the research; and epistemological reflexivity which is influenced by ontological and epistemological orientations – positivism or post-positivism, and refers to a deeper level of reflection about the research. I have become more adept at introspectively acknowledging my feelings and biases and identifying how my values, experiences, interests, beliefs may affect the situation. This has helped me grow in my understanding of social situations, and made me a better manager of people and LR. The positive implication is that I understand the history and intricacies as someone who had also experienced LR within the organisation, and as a result have a keen awareness of some of the issues related to this research. The challenge in such a situation therefore is to maintain a sufficient level of neutrality, within this same context and be able to consider alternative perspectives and approaches in drawing valid conclusions. Methodologically, I utilised qualitative approaches in gathering and analysing data for this study. Hinging primarily on the Interpretative nature of this study and my paradigmatic orientation, I reflected upon, and evaluated the social, emotional, and other human elements of the study. The interpretations of my findings should contribute to knowledge in this area and be practically useful in HRM.

The interaction of practise and literature enabled by an earlier MBA and this DBA program has helped me develop epistemological reflexivity, a practise that Willig (2013) described as a second level reflection upon the assumptions made during research. Weick (2002) cautions against the tendency for researchers to over-indulge themselves in the guise of reflexivity, and advised on a situational real-time reflexivity that considers varying perspectives within the situation and tries to mitigate biases formulated within the questions or inherent in how the research is interacting with other actors or even data as a part of the study.

Given that I tend to be influenced by the situation and I learn from reflecting on similar past experiences, my epistemology for this research is fundamentally pragmatic. This has developed from years in HR practise, working in very tense situations, trying to build alignment between two or more parties where the stakes are high. Quickly learning about the key emotions and arguments on both sides and developing sustainable, mutually-beneficial solutions have entrenched in me some pragmatic realism about my HR practise. This leans on the ontological view that reality is socially constructed; people will interpret and bring their own perspectives into their perceptions of reality. In my opinion, the perception and understanding of HRM and LR problems, is dependent on the individual actors, although research indicates that Unions can influence the perceptions of workers, particularly about organisational change and performance (Eisenberger et al, 1990; Delaney & Huselid, 1996). While I do not disagree that collective influences affect individual judgment, from my experience, a precarious labour situation can be viewed by another actor as a positive event that is necessary for the development of organisational harmony. Acknowledging the possibility of different definitions of what is real and how to approach it liberates the thought process to consider multiple possibilities or resolution.

According to Lawson (2003), a fundamental element within epistemological reflexivity is how individual thinking, mode of analysis, thought processes, disposition, interests, values and general social-cultural relationships influence what is done, how things are perceived and what approaches are adopted. "Social science cannot generate specific directives about how we should order our lives or societies. But it does produce prudential principles" (Gorski, 2013, p. 669). The quest for principles can lead to additional depth within the ontology, which in the context of this study meant determining what is subjective, driven by society, by the interactions amongst the players in a sensitive LR environment and what already exists or is outside the influence of Human Relations practise. An empirical sensation of the experience, an actual account of events and the mechanisms of interactions between facts and experiences (Archer et al, 2013) are all part of the reflections I applied to this discourse. I looked at the various levels of union membership and participation in the

organisation to understand the grass-root influences. Understanding the Union's priorities and why, was crucial in assessing the variables within the research questions. This meant stratifying the provision of HR service in the organisation, from the lowest to more strategic levels to identify specific explanations of power and relational dynamics, and relate that to how it influences the state of overall LR.

Overall, my HR experience in the oil Industry both in Nigeria and in the UK has influenced my receptivity to social interactions. The unpredictability of human behaviour and the intricacies of social interactions have made me more receptive to reflexivity and learning from those experiences. Ontologically, I believe different actors bring different contexts and provide varied perspectives which lead to richer meanings. In simple terms, my ontology tends towards relativism, where reality is understood through socially constructed meanings, and as a result, there is no single shared social reality (Ritchie et al, 2013). In this context, I believe that by immersing myself in the research situation I am better able to make meaning of the behaviours I am studying. My sense making is influenced by my situation, perspective and values. I therefore tend to explore deeper nuances in situations with particular interest in Power, dynamics and influences by the various actors. Epistemological reflexivity in this context is influenced by ontological and epistemological orientations – positivism or post-positivism, and refers to a deeper level of reflection about the research (Holt and Thorpe, 2008, p.184-185). With a fundamentally interpretative paradigm and a world view that is socially dynamic, my research sought to understand, correlate and interpret the social phenomenon, and leveraged primarily on qualitative methodologies in the process.

3.3 Methodologies considered for this study

This study focuses on LR, Human relations practise and organisation behaviour in general, with an emphasis on the interrelationship between HR organisational structures and LR in the NOC. The subjective nature of the research, characterised by various actors with differing and sometimes conflicting interests fits the

interpretative nature of my inquiry. Data collection and analysis was carried out using a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is a descriptive, non-discreet and very interactive way of collecting and utilising information. It focuses on verbal descriptions, experiences, characteristics, influences, nuances, historical context, cases, situations, power and emotional dynamics in the interaction amongst two or more parties within the study. Information can be collected through interviews, observation, and use of diaries, experiences, focus feedback, and action research (White, 2000). The study of human behaviour and social situations, are central to the qualitative research methodology (Cunliffe, 2010). The researcher plays a key role in understanding the context of the situation which according to Ritchie et al (2013) means using data collection methods that are non-invasive, flexible and sensitive to the situation.

Effectively managing the Unions is a major preoccupation of HR practitioners in organisations with thriving Union membership. The need to engage employees and ensure their alignment with organisational objectives is crucial to business success. For this reason, LR continues to be a strategic area for most leaders. In trying to determine an appropriate methodological approach, I considered quantitative, qualitative and even mixed approaches that will involve some triangulation. The issues with a quantitative approach are that it focuses on gathering and testing of numerical or discrete variables (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012). The nature of this study is more behavioural and social and not one that can easily fit into discrete values. While a survey can be administered and translated into quantifiable results, the context of the situation will not be reflected in the response and additional information and nuances that are relevant to the study will be missed. The meaning and purpose of behaviour within the study subjects is crucial in reaching any useful conclusion (Horton et al, 2004). I therefore used interviews as a method of data collection and also related this with literature reviewed within this study, as well as my HR experiences to make sense of the data. Although they can be more tasking and time consuming, Interviews are “well suited to research that requires an understanding of deeply rooted or delicate phenomena or responses to complex systems, processes

or experiences because of the depth of focus and the opportunity they offer for clarification and detailed understanding” (Ritchie et al, 2013, p.36)

LR tends to be characterised by long histories of organisational and union interactions, as the unions often emerge because of underlying employee concerns, and they either thrive or die based on how those issues are managed and how the organisation responds. Therefore, the nature of data needed for this kind of study was mostly generated data that required verbal recounting by respondents sharing their perspectives on the issues, attitudes, beliefs, behaviour or other phenomena within the study (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012). To properly understand the issues the unions present, the meanings they attach to them and how those issues are managed, it was important to engage in a conversation with the actors involved. In this study, it started with focus group discussions with groups of union members, union leaders as well as HR Advisors. The focus group discussions, which centred on the state of LR and the mind-set of employees in a highly unionised workplace, provided initial input which I used to further frame the interpretative approach to this study. This meant holding targeted interviews with the Union leaders, Union members, HR Leaders and HR Advisors. In addition, relevant documents that further buttressed the discussions were reviewed. These were mainly provided by the Union or HR Managers and consisted of historical presentations about the Business and the HR organisation, historical records of labour meetings, collective agreements and general LR correspondence. These were useful in triangulating some of the data I gathered from the interviews.

The nature of the interviews was not designed to be fully structured, as the objective was to learn about the subject as the conversation progresses. According to Ritchie et al (2013), the focus in such situations should be on identifying emergent categories, theories or trends from the data, rather than seeking to impose prior ideas. The research respects the uniqueness of each case and correlated findings with data from other sources or interviews. This meant relying a lot on the context and emotions expressed by the respondents, which is why semi structured interviews were appropriate for this study. I therefore made myself open to consider new issues

that may come to light in the interviews based on how strongly the respondents make a case.

This study is designed and approached as a case study, where I have some internal knowledge of the organisation but was carrying out the study from an external context as I was on a foreign assignment in another affiliate. This additional level of detachment bolstered the receptivity from the research participants, as they were more comfortable with sharing insights on the LR relationships and felt that my external context will reinforce the independence of the study. My HR experience in the oil Industry both in Nigeria and in the UK has influenced my receptivity to social interactions within the organisation and provided me with relevant context for reflection within the study. I did however apply some elements of the phenomenological approach (Ritchie et al, 2013) in the use of semi-structured interviews. This meant I was looking to gain meaning from the viewpoint of the respondents, rather than ascribing meaning into their situations.

The nature of core questioning was mostly the same for all respondents, but with flexibility to allow the respondents drive some of that discussion within the subject area. According to Coughlan and Brannick (2007, p.69), “when insider researchers are interviewing, they may assume too much and so not probe as much as if they were outsiders or ignorant of the situation”. To mitigate my vulnerability to bias based on my insider knowledge, I sought to understand the unique social situation by asking open questions, and I followed the respondent’s lead rather than approach the interviews with a fixed script. The core questions focused on the nature of interaction and the effectiveness of the HR structure, particularly in enabling cooperative LR. This is central to this research and so the view points from the various respondents with different organisational and personal interests was a useful data point. Discussing the subject matter with the respondents in semi-structured interviews also helped me deduce key undertones about their LR relationships. These included employee perceptions, opinions, management impression, human expectations, and overall meanings and interpretations of the participants. I was therefore about to gather rich data that helped me identify the key problem areas relevant to the study.

Documentary evidence provides a good source of data for research triangulation (Eisner, 1991). Within this research, the nature of documents reviewed have been memos exchanged between the Union and the organisation, as well as presentations highlighting HR key strategies as well as their progressive plan towards being more efficient, strategic and initiatives in LR management. “The rationale for document analysis lies in its role in methodological and data triangulation, the immense value of documents in case study research, and its usefulness as a standalone method for specialized forms of qualitative research” (Bowen, 2009,p.29). However, data from existing documents always need to be tested against information collected through other methods. In this study, it provided additional background that helped in further shaping the issues and strengthening how further inquiry was carried out.

I also acknowledge that my experiences as a HR practitioner in the Nigerian Oil Industry, with some of that time spent managing LR added value to my approach. These experiences were useful in helping me filter and make sense of the information I gathered. However to ensure that the data I gathered presented the meanings appropriately from the various respondents, I applied Hycner (1985) recommended technique of ‘bracketing my assumptions’ prior to data gathering. The intent here was to gain better awareness of my predispositions and possible bias towards the issues to be considered. Given that this is a case study, where I had in-depth pre-understanding, this approach helped me distinguish my bias from the actual data from respondents. Brannick and Coughlan (2007), highlight the challenges of pre-understanding, and advise that adopting epistemic reflexivity is beneficial and efforts aimed at ensuring a broad and fair coverage of key respondent groups as well accommodating alternative viewpoints is critical for maintaining balance and credibility. This informed the semi-structured nature of my interviews and the targeted respondents across different target groups. I therefore personally reflected upon and introspectively considered my interview questions so that I identified my presumptions. This improved my self-awareness as I contextualised the data from the interviews without losing their meanings

My familiarity with the NOC also provided me very good access to the key organisational and union leaders, an access that was very useful towards gathering rich and credible information for this study. The interviews were a mix of face to face, telephone and Skype interviews which were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. I used voice and MP3 recorders, and consent was sought from the respondents before the interview began. I planned to hold the interviews within an hour, but found that in most cases the discussion lasted more than 90 minutes and in some cases we had to continue the interview subsequently.

Most of the interviews were conducted face to face in Nigeria with the respondents and this allowed me appreciate first-hand the emotiveness of what was expressed by the respondents. A number of these meetings exceeded the 90 minutes allocated time, but the dialogue was often very rich and may sometimes delve into more generic LR issues, in which case I refocused the discussion back to the subject with some of my scripted framing questions. The few discussions I had on Skype and through telephone, were more efficient but rich nonetheless. There was less opportunity to observe the body language and judge some of the emotions behind the issues respondents' raised. However, this was not material enough to affect the information I gathered, as I actively probed key issues that were reported.

Respondents were assured that the study objectives were primarily academic and there were no secondary reasons. This was very important given that the subject relates to sensitive issues of union-management relations, and the need to avoid any perception that I was a management representative in the study. My independence reinforced by my status as an Expatriate from another affiliate provided some additional reassurance to respondents and made them keen to participate in the study. All respondents were provided full information about the study objectives and methodology, and they were informed that they could voluntarily decline to participate. In all cases, the responses of the study were anonymised at the point of collection and the analysed results were used only within the context of this study.

3.3.1 Selection of Interview Respondents

Two primary organisational activities were reviewed in this study, HR Management and LR. Two broad groups of actors therefore emerged, firstly, the HR group comprising the HR leaders, Managers and Advisors and other service providers within their scope. Secondly, the Unions, their leaders their members and other affiliated groups. Given that the HR organisation typically provides service to organisational leadership, respondents from the BL were included. This was to understand the perspective of those who experience HR service and who provide input into how HR approaches LR Management. Location factors were also taken into account in the selection of respondents, and since this is a study about LR in a NOC, most of the respondents were from NOC but representing different interests. For additional context, respondents that provided insight into the nature of HR organisational structures and how LR is managed in an affiliated UKOC were also interviewed.

The interviews were preceded by a focus group discussion, which was held with union members and HR Advisors to get a sense of labour and HR issues in the NOC from their perspective. So I held two separate meetings, first with a group of four union members/leaders, and secondly with three NOC HR Advisors. In reaching the decision to hold the focus groups, I reflected upon my own pre-understanding of the organisation and some of its labour challenges, and considered it beneficial to gather viewpoints from other stakeholders to moderate how my pre-understanding influenced the research design. This approach followed recommendations from Coughlan and Brannick (2005) to strengthen qualitative research. The purpose of this informal group discussion was to help frame the data collection focal points based on the range of experiences they shared, and provided me some structure for my subsequent data gathering. Participants were told that they were engaging in this discussion to help me frame my data gathering approach, and were invited to share key aspects of organisational history that was influencing LR management and HR practises. This discussion was not recorded but the account was summarised after each discussion maintaining full confidentiality. Some of the data gathered has been

used in the study, and also used to frame some of the questioning themes for the semi-structured interviews.

The interviewees were therefore selected based on their positions, their roles and influence, rather than just random sampling. Welman and Kruger (1999) support this approach as very effective and suited to the identification of primary participants in studies where the researcher learns from the perspectives actors in the study. My knowledge of the organisation and some of the LR issues also influenced my selection of participants to ensure rich and reliable context that is balanced and relevant to the study. In compliance with ethical standards for this study, I gained informed consent (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000; Creswell, 2012):

- Research was voluntary and Participants were purposely selected
- Research overview/purpose and procedures were explained to participants
- Risk and benefits of the study were highlighted to all participants
- Participant had the right to discontinue at any time during the study
- All interview data were anonymised at the point of collection to ensure confidentiality

Table 3 Selection of Study Participants

Interviewee	Justification
1. HR Leader in NOC x1	The HR leader in the NOC is responsible for developing and driving the key HR strategies that will enable the organisation optimally deploy its human capital. Relevant to this study is how those HR strategies help the organisation manage LR effectively. He understands the key challenges of the HR organisation and the tactics for managing the unions. He is also the primary custodian of the organisational structure that is in place. Therefore his views about the Nigerian HR organisation, the Unions, the historical experiences as well as his projection of how the relationship will evolve were considered relevant information for this study.

<p>2. BL Manager in NOC x2</p>	<p>Two different senior BL managers were interviewed to get their perspective on two fronts. First, their impressions about the current HR organisational set-up and second, how HR helps them manage LR. Their opinion on what works well and what doesn't, as well as current challenges and ideas on how the issues can be improved were all very useful input for this study.</p> <p>This was particularly important as wage negotiations continue to be led by BL Senior Managers in the NOC. HR plays a facilitating role in these bargaining meetings. In my judgement, it was very important to capture the perspectives of business leaders who have been involved in such wage negotiations. They proved to be very knowledgeable about the workings of labour issues in the organisation and provided very valuable input to this study.</p>
<p>3. HR Managers in NOC x2</p>	<p>The HR Managers are directly involved in driving key HR strategies in the organisation, either by leading HR teams or administering HR processes. They understand organisational history, LR prospects, challenges and management strategies. Their opinion on union leadership, union membership and how the HR organisation functions was considered relevant to the study. Their account of how they were enabling/developing HR advisors to impact the organisation and drive LR strategies was useful.</p>
<p>4. HR Advisors in NOC x3</p>	<p>Similar justification to HR Managers but from the perspective of HR Advisors, who were lower in the organisation hierarchy. To meet the study objectives, it was important to understand how they see the HR organisation working and how much they felt involved or empowered to handle labour relation issues. Their opinion on the Unions, their membership and the overall concept of cooperative or competitive LR was sought.</p>

5. HR Manager in UKOC x1	Similar justification to HR Managers above, but with the context of how the HR organisation is set-up in the UK affiliate, and how they manage LR. This perspective was considered important in providing additional depth to the assessment of structural effectiveness of the HR organisation. It was also useful to compare the nature of LR issues that exist in both affiliates and analyse how that has affected how LR is managed.
6. HR Advisors in UKOC X1	Again, this is to gain different perspective in a different affiliated organisation, and deepen the understanding of the HR organisational structure. The level of awareness of labour issues by the HR Advisors and how empowered they felt in managing labour issues was a useful data point.
7. Union Leaders in NOC x3	The Unions represent the significant second party to the study, and input from the Union leaders was necessary to understand their perspective on organisational history, context, challenges and strategies. Their insight into membership and cooperative or competitive LR was particularly useful. Their opinion about the HR organisation itself, how they interface with key HR contacts and if they found it effective was probed. Overall, the interview sought to understand their vision and future strategies and how in their opinion LR can be improved within the organisation and industry as a whole.
8. Employees/ Union members in NOC X2	The perspective of employees/union members was necessary to understand why they join the union, how they interact with the union leaders, their opinion on the union strategies and how the organisation manages union issues. They provided important perspective as employees who are also union members, and more importantly stakeholders who have expectations of Union leaders that directly influence the Union's behaviours.

Two employees/union members in the NOC declined to participate in the study, due to scheduling constraints. They were replaced by two other employees/union members that were selected to ensure representation from different work locations.

3.3.2 Interview questioning themes

The Interview questions were structured along key themes related to the research subject and administered in a semi-structured manner. These lines of questioning are available in Appendix I, and were as much as possible linked to the research questions of this study. Some of the responses overlapped the research questions, which was expected since the research questions are interrelated. This analysis was relevant in demonstrating the linkages between the line of questioning and the study objectives, and enhanced my ability to reflect upon my experiences and what the responses imply for the LR issue. The semi-structured nature of the interviews provided me some flexibility to navigate through the questions across broad themes, as long as response from the respondents are relevant to the research subject.

3.3 Data Analysis and Sufficiency

The adoption of semi-structured interviews in this study achieved the objective of getting at the underlying issues and meanings, without predefining those meanings or trying to fit it within a certain criteria. Hycner (1985) provided a very good framework for analysing semi-structured interview data which is beneficial in this case study. Each step within this framework is discussed below for this study:

- **Data transcription:** The interviews were recorded using MP3 players for the face to face and telephone interviews. For the Skype calls I used a software called *MP3 Skype Recorder* to record the conversation. The large amount of recorded data needed to be transcribed, and Hycner (1985) recommended transcribing everything including the literal statements and other significant non-verbal communications. This ensured the meanings were preserved prior to further

analysis. *Inqscribe* was another software I used at this stage to playback the media files while concurrently typing the conservation

- **Reduction:** this stage involved reviewing the transcripts to identify general meanings and themes, without unduly changing the meaning provided by the respondent (Groenewald, 2004). This was a sensitive part of the data analysis and Hycner (1985) recommended suspending/bracketing my meanings, so that the meaning of the respondents came through clearly in subsequent listening and reviews. While I had a good pre-understanding of the issue, it was important to ensure that the data from respondents came through clearly in my data analysis and so direct and significant accounts from the respondents were quoted appropriately within the study.
- **Identifying units of general meaning.** This is a more rigorous part of the data analysis, where I reviewed the transcripts to pick out key literal and implied meanings.
- **Picking out meanings relevant to research:** meanings identified were selected based on relevance to the research questions. Hycner (1985) recommended independent verification of the relevant meaning, but since I was the only researcher in this study I did not engage any supporting research assistance. I focused on eliminating redundancies without losing the meaning, and referred back to the tapes to validate captured responses. I also incorporated a number of quoted responses in the data analysis to increase the rigour.
- **Cluster meanings and determine themes from clusters:** part of the objective of having 10 or more respondents was to identify themes or clusters of meanings and key issues emanating from the interviews. I eventually secured 15 respondents, which on average was about three participants from the various key stakeholder groups. This way, I was able to corroborate or contrast responses that had similar meanings from stakeholders who held different interests. This strengthened the study's rigour and also ensured that I was able to gather balanced information between the sometimes conflicting parties. Where themes were common across a majority of stakeholder groups, then I examined the issue further for significance.

There was also more assurance of data sufficiency as interviews progressed. Morse (1995) identified data saturation as the point when no new data or information is observed. In trying to operationalise data saturation, Guest et al (2006) examined information from sixty non-random interviews and determined that meta-themes emerged usually in the first six in-depth interviews, and saturation point would on average start to emerge from about twelve interviews. Francis et al (2010) identified key principles to be applied rather than making a generic recommendation on saturation. They advised that researchers should first determine a minimum interview sample size, and then identify how many more interviews they will undertake from the point when no new data was emerging. In this study, I set out to get at least two key actors from each major stakeholder group. These include the Union members, Union leaders, HR advisors, HR leaders and BL leaders. This meant a minimum of ten respondents in all, from across five different stakeholder groups. Key themes emerged after the first few interviews, most of which correlated with information from the focus group discussions. Data saturation was reached by the end of the 10th interview, but I continued and interviewed at least one more respondent from each stakeholder group. The diversity enhanced the richness of the data and provided some confidence that the fifteen respondents in the study were sufficient.

3.4 Summary

Qualitative methods were utilised in gathering data to meet the objectives of this study. This was primarily through semi structured Interviews of purposely targeted respondents. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me gather information relevant to the study not limited by my frame of reference. Recognising my role as a researcher susceptible to bias in this case study, I used Hycner's (1985) framework for phenomenological reviews to complement my interview analysis. This allowed respondents contribute to the issues highlighted from this study and also preserve the meanings from their responses. The next chapter presents the data collected, identifies the trends and relate findings to the literature earlier reviewed in this study.

Chapter four Data Collection and Analysis

The previous chapter explained the research methodology applied to this study. Interviews were used to gather required data related to the study questions. Study participants belonged to one of five groups, Union Leaders, Union Members, HR Managers and Advisors, BL Managers or UK Manager and Advisors. Participants were targeted for their key roles in each of the subgroups, and for balanced representation of issues from multiple perspectives.

The interviews were carried out over a month, with respondents both within the NOC and the UKOC. A total of 15 respondents were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. Data was transcribed and reduced as recommended by Groenewald, (2004). Key themes were identified and reviewed without reducing the general meaning presented by the respondents. This information is analysed in detail in this chapter, cross-referencing it with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and relevant practitioner experiences. Appropriate interpretations were drawn, including an evaluation of how the findings address the study questions.

4.1 Bracketing my own assumptions

One of the key considerations in a qualitative case study is how the experiences of the researcher shape the study, in particular how this affects his/her perspective and the richness of reflexivity that this brings (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). The influences of personal experiences have to be balanced against the preserved meanings from study respondents. Hycner (1985) outlined a useful framework that helps researchers bracket their assumptions when interpreting data. Although developed for phenomenological studies, I found the key principles in the framework useful in identifying, isolating, and subsequently utilising my experiences to bring the right level of researcher's context to the study findings. I was able to do this by personally reflecting and introspectively considering the interview questions before using them for data collection from respondents.

I have spent years managing unions within the Industry, and so have over the years adopted a capitalist pro-management stance about how unions should be curtailed in the workplace. However, confronting those experiences has helped me to isolate my predispositions and focus more on what I am learning from the data. In applying myself to this research, I found that I was better able to appreciate the issues from the perspective of the employees as well as from the Union leaders. This ability to change perspectives through reflection was not a particularly comfortable adjustment, but one that further enlightened my understanding of the issues.

The key themes of this reflection are presented below.

4.1.1 The LR Relationship in NOC

I think the LR environment continues to be very tense. It has been characterised by a long history of power struggles between the union that is trying to assert itself, and company management that feels that the union is too intrusive. With decades of such struggles, which are common in the industry and aggravated by mergers and combinations, it is unrealistic to expect either a sudden amicable relationship or an unpopular non-assertive union. However, the levels and likelihood of business disruptions associated with a labour dispute may have reduced in recent times due to emerging mutual respect on both sides of the power each one wields. The journey towards mutual trust and partnership is likely to be a long one in the industry.

4.1.2 The influences of historical and cultural context

The organisational history is often characterised by merger milestones, with employees on either side of a significant organisational change. The new organisation came with the need to instil discipline in the management of the resources, and try to bring the Nigerian affiliate to similar standards of efficiency typical with more developed affiliates. The local implication of that change is that Managers felt less empowered, and employees felt the organisation has become less caring. The change however appears to have improved the organisation's long term

sustainability and provided a clear pathway towards efficient resource utilisation. However, the complexity of National LR may not have been fully taken into account. A common development in the industry is the gradual withdrawal or reduction of social programmes such as social club, subsidised schooling and other employee/community related projects, which had the effect of instilling greater efficiencies but reduced the paternal nature of the organisation. Nigerian employees who are used to such supportive programmes continue to channel their grievances through the Union.

Given that the majority of the workforce today were hired after the merger, a useful datapoint from the study was the prevalence of pre-merger sentiments amongst study respondents.

4.1.3 The effectiveness of the HR organisation

The HR organisation itself has not been isolated from the political and organisational changes that have taken place in the Industry. The push for more alignment with global HR functions has put pressure on local HR professionals to improve their competencies. A more disciplined approach to people management and increasingly assertive BL managers may have affected local HR's influence. In coping with a more assertive BL, an agitating workforce and the expectations of Global HR, the NOC HR may be struggling to reassert itself. However, the increasing efficiency measured by headcount reduction is considered progressive, as technology and process advancements improve service delivery.

The absence of similar labour problems in other affiliates can sometimes make it hard to get regional/global decision makers to understand the local context or provide adequate support. It is therefore not unusual for local HR organisations to bear the blame for the resulting labour crisis. In trying to keep in tune with global push on HR standards, while dealing locally with more assertive unions – the HR organisation may not have the time to proactively execute a specific labour strategy, nor cater to

its own internal developmental needs. It is possible that there will still be some level of misalignment within the HR organisation on key strategic priorities (including LR priorities), and how to achieve them.

4.1.4 Organisational approaches to Managing LR

I am not sure that there is any certainty about what kind of LR model would work for the Nigerian organisation. There is pressure to reduce how much time HR spends on non-core HR activities, while concurrently trying to reduce the likelihood of the union causing business disruptions through various forms of labour action. The union continues to be a major force in communicating and shaping the opinions of the workforce, and while the likelihood of labour disputes may have reduced, the ability of the union to carry out disruptive actions is unlikely to have waned.

The challenge of trying to meet global HR standards may have constrained the sustainable development of a more local solution to a rather complicated labour situation. The insight I have gained from a working assignment in the UK oil industry has made me more appreciative of the power of workforce engagement, especially if a vibrant union actively competes for the hearts and minds of the workers. In comparison, the connection between employee engagement and LR has not been fully strengthened in the Nigerian organisation and may be factor in its LR challenges.

4.2 Study Findings

4.2.1 Key Themes from Focus group discussions and Interviews

Interviews were preceded by discussion with focus groups before data was gathered from interviews. These were informal meetings held with groups of union members, union leaders and HR Advisors. The focus group discussions centred on the state of LR and the mind-set of employees in a highly unionised workplace, and provided initial input, which was used to frame the interpretative approach to this study. The

key themes from the focus groups and the Interviews were mostly consistent with more detailed information from the interviews. The key issues arising from the discussions are summarised in Table 4 below. I used frequency indicators (High, Moderate, Low) to stratify the issues based on how often they were raised and how strongly respondents felt.

Table 4 Themes from Study Findings: Focus Groups & Interviews

Frequency Indicators:	
H – issue highlighted in high frequency and strong passionate views expressed by multiple respondents	
M – issue highlighted in Moderate frequency, with strong passionate views expressed by some respondents	
L – issue highlighted in low frequency, and moderate views expressed	
Cluster of Issues	Themes
Group: NOC Union Members x3 / Union Leaders x2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of trust linked to pre-merger and post-merger differences in the organisation - H Post-merger organisation perceived an uncaring about employees – H Union leaders feel that HR personalities sometimes complicate the Labour Relationship - H Union leaders do not trust some of the HR Managers involved in managing LR – H The LR structure is not clearly laid out; role/authority of LR Manager is unclear to the union/organisation – H 	<p>Organisational history and impact on Union’s Trust</p> <p>Clarity of HR structures and its effects on LR</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union maintains very strong interface with membership – at all levels, in all locations, at all times, through various modes - H • Union membership still at an all-time high, and active recruitment and engagement within Union circles continue - H • Union members and employees understand the general business case but don't feel engaged as partners – H • Union members feel their supervisors/managers do not show enough empathy – H • Supervisors not keenly aware of Labour guidelines and application of key policies - H • The annual negotiations are an opportunity for Union members to get as much as they can - H • Management has discontinued discretionary adjustments, so Union leaders approach negotiations with intense pressure from their members – H • Significant external/government influences on labour climate significant labour issues being tackled at a Government/National level: Petroleum Industry Bill, deregulation – M • Concerns about Contractor pay and conditions of service- H • Union leaders very involved in general labour movement and issues happening within the industry – M • Unions concerned about how Expatriates are utilised in the organisation – H 	<p>Union's engagement of its members</p> <p>How Supervisors and Managers engage their employees</p> <p>Impact of LR on Annual negotiations</p> <p>External influences on the state of LR in the NOC</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offshore/Deepwater locations feel more isolated - M • Other field locations with HR presence have better connection with HR - M 	Effects of HR presence on the state of LR
<p>Group: NOC HR Advisors x3 / HR Managers x2 / HR Leader x1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some flux in the group from adapting to recent change to embedded/services structure – H • HR employees feel that change has caused a divide between services and embedded groups - H • HR organisation seeking to align with Global standards - M • Positive tone from HR leadership on outlook and how they are managing HR/LR issues – L • HR Advisors not feeling confident about their roles in the new organisation – H • HR Advisors do not feel they have enough support - H • Shared pessimism about the HR organisation from HR Advisors, they don't feel empowered in their roles - H • LR managed by a few in HR – H • No obvious employee engagement forums – HR not seeking to 'be seen' by employees. Priorities are senior management – M • LR structure is not clearly laid out; HR Advisors not sure how to interface with LR Manager; role and authority issues also unclear – L 	<p>The challenges of adapting to a three legged stool HR structure</p> <p>HR Advisors feeling inadequate in their roles</p> <p>The resourcing level of the LR group & clarity of roles and responsibilities</p>

<p>Group: UKOC HR Advisor x1/ HR Manager x1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR Advisors play a key role in LR matters – M • The LR Manager works closely with embedded HR team – M • Competencies in LR management are developed across all embedded HR Advisors - M • Quarterly I&C meetings are held closely with the BL across all functions, with employee reps – M • Consultation on all key matters happen through the forum facilitated by HR Advisors, leaving little need for Unions – M • The UKOC interfaces closely with multiple COEs, including the LR COE - M 	<p>Role of HR advisors in LR Management</p> <p>Structure of engagement and consultation with employees</p>
<p>Group: NOC BL Managers x2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared concern about Supervisors and Managers competencies in engaging their employees – H • BL express need to help supervisors/managers become better at employee engagement and LR management – M • BL unsure of how HR reorganisation is impacting them and what value they add – H • BL managers expect more from HR in employee engagement and proactive LR management – M 	<p>The competencies of Supervisors and Managers in managing LR</p> <p>The alignment between HR and the BL</p>

4.2.2 Data Analysis: Use of supportive Quotations

The themes identified were discussed in more detail in subsequent subsections. Where the issue identified is of strong interest or frequently mentioned, I selected quotations from the interviews that highlighted the common viewpoints from a particular respondent group to share the context of their language and the emotiveness of the issues. I also compared these with general viewpoints from other respondent groups, highlighting convergence or divergence where applicable. I have focused on quotations that represent a general view that emerged across two or more group of respondents, exploring the different viewpoints on the subject areas, and discussing them for balanced representation and enriched understanding. Table 5 shows which respondent groups had strong views on a key theme, and where quotations have subsequently been used in this chapter.

Table 5 Themes by Respondents and Use of Supportive Quotations

Themes	Respondent Groups					
	Union leaders	Union Members	NOC HR	UK HR	BL MGRS	Quotes Used?
Organisational history and impact on Union's Trust	X	X	X			X
Clarity of HR structures and its effects on LR	X	X	X			X
Union's engagement of its members	X	X	X			X
How Supervisors and Managers engage their employees	X	X	X		X	X
Impact of LR on Annual negotiations	X	X	X		X	X
External influences on the state of LR in the NOC	X		X			X
The effects of expatriate utilisation on LR	X					
Effects of HR presence on the state of LR	X	X	X			X
Clarity of HR structures and its effects on LR	X	X	X		X	X
Union's engagement of its members	X	X				X
The challenges of adapting to a three legged stool HR structure			X		X	X
HR Advisors feeling inadequate in their roles			X			X
The resourcing level of the LR group & clarity of roles and responsibilities			X	X		X
Role of HR advisors in LR Management			X	X		X
Structure of engagement and consultation with employees		X	X	X		X
The competencies of Supervisors and Managers in managing LR	X		X		X	X
The alignment between HR and the BL			X	X	X	X

Corden (2007) opined that quotations are useful in presenting evidence, similar or differing viewpoints and in explaining how a phenomenon is understood. Re-echoing these views, White et al (2003) advised that quotations in research should be contributory to the commentary, rather than just repeat an issue already explained. They should amplify the issues raised, to enrich understanding. Quotations should not compromise confidentiality and should be diverse across various groups of respondents, and as much as possible be presented in a balanced manner. It is acceptable to change or remove minor details that may compromise confidentiality. Where quotations have been edited, they should be properly highlighted. Omissions should be indicated with ellipses, while words added for clarity should be in brackets.

I have also used some quotes that were particularly very vivid and are better represented in the respondents' words. A few quotations from the Union were highlighted in this regard, primarily as their language is particularly colourful, and often includes metaphors that can be vivid in its context. Corden and Sainsbury (2006) also advised that researchers should give due consideration to appropriate anonymity and sensitivity of what was quoted, so that they are not inimical to the interest of the respondents. In selecting quotes that properly represent emotive issues in this research therefore, I have taken due care to ensure that the anonymity of respondents is preserved.

4.2.3 Organisational History and the Union Mind-set in the NOC

The passion and energy expressed by Union leaders and members about the case for unionisation and their participation was in general very strong. There was general consensus amongst respondents that the Union was an effective platform to preserve working conditions, provide employment security and negotiate better employment terms each year.

"Without the union, most of us would have either being fired by now or we probably will be earning half of what we earn" NOC Employee/Union Member

“The union is concerned about improving the terms and conditions of service for our members. We want to protect their employment. We want to improve their share of the business profitability. We also want to ensure the business continues to survive so that we continue to remain in employment” NOC Union Leader

“Our members understand what the union stand for, and even non-active members know that it is in their interest to be members of the union, just in case” NOC Employee/Union Member

Employees made consistent references to the pre-merger state of the organisation. They pointed out that the organisation was more caring, provided a range of social programmes and benefits that made them feel like a part of the family. Post-merger, employees and union leaders felt the organisation became more impersonal and was primarily focused on driving work targets. There was a strong sense of justification amongst respondents about their continued union membership based on changes in managerial approach. Employees in general feel that the organisation had become less caring and management appears to be more concerned about the financial bottom line.

“We used to have a caring company but not anymore. For us in the field, the Employee club was the only social centre we had, but since the community burnt it over a decade ago, the company has withdrawn most forms of support” NOC Employee/Union Member

“Well, we have experienced the good days and the new Tiger days. We call them the new Tiger days because of how the company bares its fangs at employees and how we always have to fight to get what we deserve” NOC Employee/Union Member

“I was initially indifferent to Union activities, even though I have always being a member. However, recent performance pressure from my Managers and examples of how people have come close to losing their jobs, makes me pay more attention to

what the Union says. I feel I need the Union just incase the company takes a drastic action that may affect my employment” NOC Employee/Union Member

The account of the BL Managers corroborate the union views that a more disciplined approach to managing the business was adopted in the organisation after the merger. HR Managers also explained how they implemented a number of key HRM practises such as the discontinuation of discretionary payments and a forced ranking performance system. The result appears to be improved organisational performance evidenced by the accounts of improved utilisation of resources, including human capital. However, these changes appear to have aggravated the state of LR.

“It is no longer business as usual we have to be able to compete on cost, efficiency, reliability and productivity with the rest of the world. Unfortunately, the Union is often reluctant to go along with that change” NOC BL Manager

“I think the Union like to whip-up sentiments by referring to the days of business wastages. This business would have been dead by now had we continued with all the unnecessary societal spending we were involved in” NOC HR Manager

“Look, an average employee cost me twice as much as they do 5 years ago, and twice as much another 5 years before that. I expect productivity to comparatively increase over the same period; else we are out of business. Since we all know that productivity is not increasing that dramatically, then we need to be reasonable or the reality is that we will have to look for ways to do more with less” NOC BL Manager

The Managers had expressed concerns about rising employment costs and how this was driving them to explore the utilisation of contractor resources, as well as maximise the performance from their employees. A forced ranking performance management system which was adopted after the merger was intended to improve workplace performance, but employees see it as a threat to employment security. In the face of this uncertainty, employees’ trust in the organisation is declining and as a result, they became more active Union members. Management actions after the

merger have had the unintended effect of threatening employment security and its drive towards efficiencies is perceived as being anti-union.

“There are some elements of forced ranking that makes you feel uncomfortable. Most people who walk in through our doors are great hardworking employees, else we won’t hire them. At the end of the year, I still have to identify a bottom 10% and show them out of the door if they do not improve, and this goes on year after year. It’s challenging, even for us Managers, so I can understand why the Union and employees continue to feel aggrieved about this” NOC BL Manager

“it’s all about finding the right balance. I think we tolerated a lot of wastages and mediocre performance prior to the merger. Since then, some of the discipline, including the pressure of the performance system has actually improved organisational performance” NOC HR Manager

“If you want policies explained – go to Union, if you do not understand a certain issue – go to the union, if you are threatened or have problems with your supervisor, go to Union – they will help you and you can trust them because they are just like you” NOC Employee/Union Member

The Union mind-set based on prevalent opinion expressed by its leaders, is one that sees Company Management more as a threat rather than a strategic partner, and therefore they continually approach issues with scepticism and seek to protect their power base. While they generally seek to maximise the conditions of service, they also pay attention to organisational performance and are keen on ensuring that the organisation remains a viable going concern:

“Our objective is to secure the best conditions for our members and preserve their employment. If our members do well, the company will do well. If the company does well, we know that our employees will be well” NOC Union Leader

“This company has prospered fuelled by our hard-work. We will work day and night to make sure the company succeeds and our members must be rewarded accordingly. The problems we tend to have arise when we put in so much to improve the bottom-

line, and then Management turns around and says that we need to manage our salary costs. Why are National salaries always the primary target for cost discipline, even when competitive data suggest otherwise?” NOC Union Leader

On one hand, the Union is clearly trying to maximise the benefit conditions of its members, and yet from the interviews, the union is keenly aware of business performance indicators and the implications that positive performance has for the livelihood of its members. Employees and the union have a deep sense of pride in the organisation and their work effort and will want to see the organisation succeed. They however do this, expecting to get their fair share in the way of pay and benefits. The tension therefore is coming from a disconnect between their high expectations and what Management perceives as an unduly high level of reward that already exists in the sector. The BL Managers were deeply concerned about long-term sustainability, especially since there was an annual bargaining cycle. The union was more short term in its outlook – pointing out to recent performance figures and using that to justify their demands even where its demands were significantly out of tune with the economic wage market. This sustained disconnect between these two key parties continues to pose an LR challenge to the NOC.

4.2.4 How the Union engages its members

What came across from the interviews with unionised employees was how assured they felt about their union membership and the availability of the union to support them. They each knew a number of union leaders personally, and had one within reach in their work locations. The NOC Union have adopted various forms of engagement with their members even using social media and creating technology driven platforms for the members to share information and exchange ideas.

“On each platform and in each business group, there are union delegates who articulate issues from each group and act as the glue. We also actively use our emails and our blackberry group to share quick updates and alerts. We are constantly in touch and have various ways of reaching our union leaders” NOC Employee/Union Member

“There is always a union representative on board; afterall we are workers in the same location too. So their labour issues are our issues, which is the strength of our representation. So we share messages in the dining halls, during work, in the evenings when we are changing shift, via emails, via social media, during conferences, during periodic congress...we are always in touch” NOC Union leader

The union was able to cascade its messages effectively, and use the same channels to gather information that was useful in shaping its bargaining strategies. This included information about Supervisor behaviours, especially on remote locations; business performance, safety concerns and general information that was useful in the context of advocating a case for their members.

“It’s very impressive how quickly they share information during our negotiation. They apparently have Blackberry groups which they created, so they were actually having private clandestine conversations while we were all in the room...” NOC HR Manager

The HR managers also confirmed this strong connection between the Union and its members during negotiations. By sharing information in real-time with their members, the union was operating as a unified, well organised group and improving its ability to stay strategically one step ahead of Management in shaping the opinion of employees. This Union behaviour of leveraging technology and sharing information real-time appears to be a relatively modern tactic.

“Management sometimes forget that our members are employees. They are the ones who do all the work, and they are in every single department. It sometimes surprises us that they try to hide information from us or refuse to share key business developments, when it is our members that are working these issues for them” NOC Union Leader

“We respect each other but we do not trust each other. So even during our periodic labour meetings, Management shares new information which we will independently validate with our members” NOC Union Leader

The Union leaders also expressed very strong understanding about how empowering it was to stay connected with their members. While HR and BL respondents were aware of this engagement and how influential the Union was in shaping the opinions of employees, there was no apparent strategy to counter or even leverage this platform to promote organisational alignment. Organisational leadership came across as being somewhat helpless about the way business messages were being second-guessed by the Union, with employees aligning more with messages cascaded by the Union than by their supervisors. Understanding how the Union effectively engages its members is the first step towards determining how to effectively manage this issue. My opinion from the interviews was that the BL managers and supervisors did not quite grasp the extent of how effectively the Unions were executing this tactic. More importantly, there was not a clear strategy on what to do to manage this.

“It is clear we need to engage the workforce more, and counter the Union’s narrative. We have to find ways to limit the influence of the union and how it is skewing the opinions of employees. The Union has no scruples in putting down the Company leadership if any action is not in its own selfish interest. We need to take a step back and determine how to aggressively engage our employees and share business truths with them” NOC BL Manager

“The Union needs to be understood and constantly engaged. We need to recognise that our employees will mostly support the union – so rather than pursue a strategy of aggression – what we need to do is find a way to partner better with them” NOC BL Manager

“I’m not sure we have made much success in trying to counter what the Union tells employees, I think the credibility the Union has at this time is unassailable. Rather than pursue a counter strategy, I think we should be looking for ways to cooperate better, although I know that some of our HR and even BL managers would rather prefer to counter the Union” NOC HR Advisor

The BL Managers expressed mixed messages, some proposing that the Union should be countered with a management narrative or action; while others advocating a more cooperative approach. The HR objective on LR Management was to limit the influence of the Union and reduce the likelihood of a disruptive labour action. What was unclear was whether this should be executed through a counter or cooperative stance, or possibly a mix of both. At the time of this study, there was no clear indication which approach the NOC was going to adopt, or even if it will do anything differently at all.

4.2.5 The significance of Annual negotiations

The NOC management negotiates annually with the Union, and has done so for nearly two decades. Similar practises take place amongst other operators in the Industry, different timing but same interval of one year. From the accounts of respondents, the negotiations have in recent years lasted anywhere from a month to five months, and have resulted in various forms of labour action in the industry, with varying severity. The energy, time and impact the annual wage negotiations have are very significant and it affects any consideration about how the HR organisation manages LR.

“The Wage negotiations are the singular most important labour activity of each year. It can be long, contentious, and painful. Everyone holds their breath until it is over” NOC HR Manager

"Frankly, it's an annual shakedown. We pay or we take a strike, it's as simple as that. And no one outside of the organisation really cares. Just keep the oil flowing!" NOC BL Manager

"Because of the Union each year we get good general increases which are 2 or 3 times the merit increases. So why should I bother if my Manager doesn't want to reward me with merit or promotion. I just do my best and support the union during negotiations". NOC Employee/Union member

The HR Managers confirmed that these negotiations usually involve about fifteen employees (union leaders) and about eight management representatives, and this is a significant investment of time and resources. Union leaders allude to the fact that negotiations were not as contentious, particularly before the merger as Management used to discretionally adjust pay during the year, thereby blunting the need for negotiations by the unions. This has however changed since the merger, as a more disciplined approach adopted by the company translated to the removal of such discretionary adjustments. The responses from employees indicate that they see this change in posture by the organisation as being anti-union, and not in their interest. As a result, they pressure their Union leaders to drive the negotiations very hard.

"Did you know we used to celebrate milestones like new discoveries, safety records, expanded production etc., with employees receiving a token payment like 1 months' salary? Those days are so long gone. Despite our significant projects and expansion, management will insist we must wait for annual negotiation to debate and argue over pay increases. So we have learnt to gear-up for these negotiations and make sure we get our fair share each year" NOC Union Leader

"The current situation where we continue to leapfrog one another in pay adjustments each year is not sustainable. The bubble will definitely burst soon" NOC BL Manager

"We only have one opportunity each year to get what we deserve; we therefore have to fight till the finish to make sure we get the best we can" NOC Union Leader

The energy, the passion and significant time investment all add to the tension that pervades the entire organisation during these annual negotiations. The unions feel that they only have one opportunity each year to negotiate as fiercely as they can to get the right results. The loss of trust over the years has led to an unwieldy documentation of pay, benefit and even policy items that are only changeable through formal negotiations between both parties. This makes the annual negotiations a rather prolonged affair, which has the effect of causing significant tension across the organisation. HR respondents also confirm that the bargaining comparator group is a small group of major multinationals who operate joint ventures in partnership with the Nigerian Government. Pay adjustments by one company will invariably mean that other companies will have to adjust. This unending cycle of adjustments fuelled by Union threats have driven wages to a relatively high level in the industry.

The NOC HR Managers report a feeling of helplessness during bargaining when the Union wield threats of disruptive labour action to press home their demands. This is because the Government trade dispute structures and processes are largely ineffective; again further increasing the stakes for each party. The Unions already wield a lot of national influence due to the importance of the oil sector to the Nigerian economy, and so usually use this advantage for collective bargaining. For the NOC, the internal negotiations determine how salary increases are delivered. The emphasis on salary increases rather than short-term one-off lump sums is to promote long-term retention. However, the challenges of the annual negotiations appear to have eliminated any perceived gains, as industrial peace has become a primary objective for most of the operators in the industry.

*“A major problem we have is that when we have a dispute, we really don’t have where to go. The Ministry of Labour is often not interested in our problems, and wants us to resolve on our own. They are also very sympathetic to the Union and sometimes, they seem afraid of the threats the Unions wield. In such a scenario, we often don’t have mediatory support and the Union uses this to their advantage, not just with us but in the Industry as a whole “*NOC HR Manager

“There is clearly a need for us to work with the Industry, the Unions and the Government towards fashioning out a sustainable approach to our wage negotiations. While we are constrained from an anti-trust perspective on the extent of our discussion, the main challenge is that we haven’t had much support from the Government so far on this” NOC HR Leader

The HR leader acknowledge the need to review and positively change their approach to annual bargaining, which over the years has grown in scope and importance. The Unions reportedly want to document every single agreement or practise and then seek to renegotiate at the next opportunity. While each labour environment is peculiar and requires its own solutions, practises even within the corporation are different from other affiliates. The UKOC has a much lower level of unionisation and reports that it has an established process for periodic and regular consultation with all employees.

“Our quarterly I&Cs are facilitated by the respective HR advisors and chaired by the BL Managers. These are effective engagement forums where we discuss key issues ranging from benefits, policy changes and concerns employees may have” UKOC HR Advisor

These interim regular engagements serve the purpose of addressing routine issues and minor bargaining. BL Managers with their respective HR Advisors hold meetings at least once a quarter with employee representation (non-union) in all business groups. They discuss key issues in these periodic meetings thereby directly engaging employees and as a result, fostering a state of cordial LR.

“We engage the unions quarterly as well, through our Joint Consultative Committee (JCC). The Union leaders then share the key messages from the meetings with their members and bring up concerns in future meetings” NOC HR Manager

“We hold major negotiations with the Union and document broad terms of agreement once in 3 years. In between that time, we may meet to discuss minor adjustments annually based on industry or economic trends. In effect, we do meet annually but on a smaller, less critical scale” UKOC HR Manager

What we learn from the interviews is that although the UK organisation has also had unions for several decades, unionisation has declined such that levels are much lower in comparison to the NOC. However, most of the Operations and Maintenance technicians are still unionised and negotiations hold periodically. Major negotiations hold once in three years, with more focused annual mini-bargaining that is limited in scope. The HR manager confirms that they also use the consultation platform to address smaller issues of concerns, including feedback on benefit related items. These consultations hold directly with employees not just with Union leaders as we see in the NOC, and so there is an effective process of consulting with employees and addressing issues early before they crystallise.

4.2.6 HR organisational structure in the NOC and the UKOC

“We have tinkered with the HR structure in the last few years, bringing it in line with Global HR practises & standards. We want our HR folks to be at par with other HR professionals” NOC HR Leader

“The face of HR has changed dramatically, we now have separate functional Embedded and Services teams locally, and we leverage of a network of shared service centres to provide us services support, while the Centres of Expertise provide us support in Compensation and OE” NOC HR Manager

The HR leader affirmed recent efforts towards improving the HR organisation and changes executed within the current decade as more HRM practises were introduced into the organisation. The drive is to align the NOC HR organisation with Global standards and the corporate norms, as functionalization within various service groups

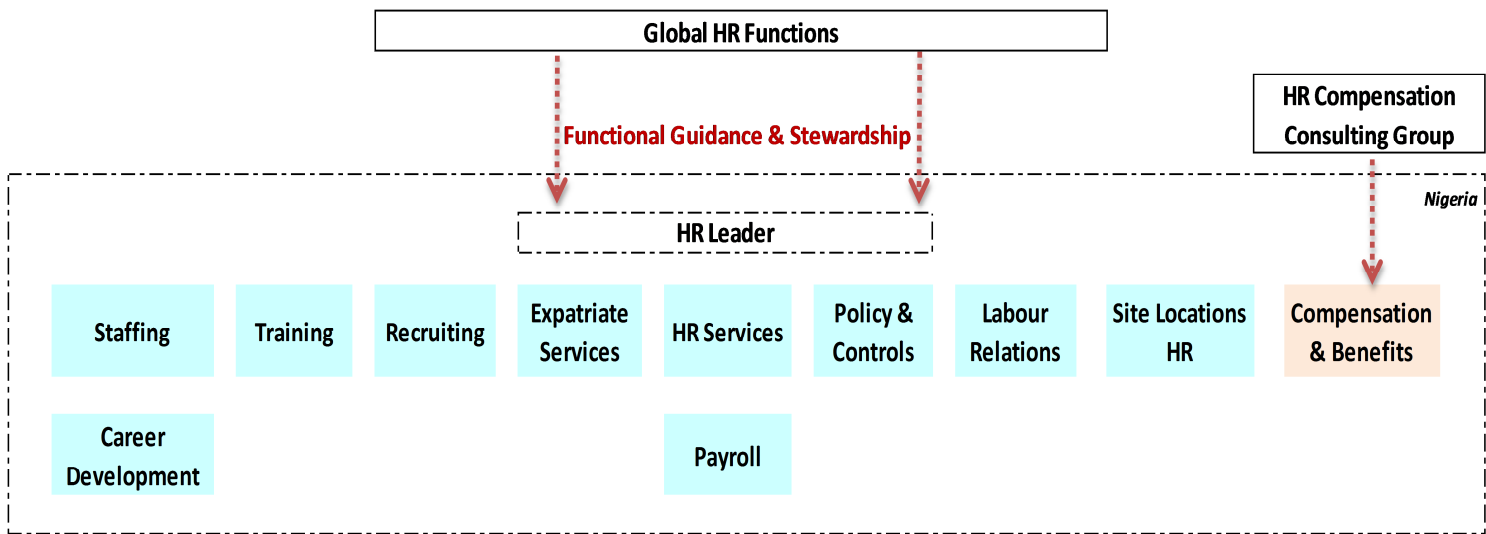
has increased the urgency for OE reforms. The HR leader shared documents that depicted the HR organisation that was in place over a decade ago, and how it has changed over the years. The structure from the documents showed the HR organisation as a fully self-contained organisation until about two years ago. This is shown in Figure 3 below, and basically comprised a full suite of BL HR generalists who handled all personnel matters and a Services group that managed all forms of HR services from Payroll, Training, Recruiting and Expatriate Services centre. There were also separate teams for Policy design and LR.

“When I joined the organisation many years ago, it felt like a circus. We had so many people, we used so much paper and everyone reported to a different Manager. We had a Manager for every major HR activity – Training, Recruiting, Career Development, Staffing, Payroll, Expatriate services, Compensation, Policy, Field Locations, LR” NOC HR Manager

“I am not altogether sure yet, if our current HR system is better than it used to be. We used to have a lot of HR processes and programs within our control, but today with multiple global interfaces, services running from different locations..., I just feel that we are not as effectively aligned with the local business as we should “ NOC HR Manager

The HR Managers explain that the organisation interfaced very minimally with other regional or global HR organisations as functional guidance simply flowed through the hierarchy with the HR leader being the primary point of contact with the Global HR world. The only exception was with the Compensation and Benefits group, where there was some global standardization and alignment on principles. Therefore, while the local HR organisations had a lot of discretion on pay settlements, the form those settlements will take required review with a global compensation-consulting group. This group later became the Regional/Global Compensation COE supporting HR organisations in the corporation. The structure below describes the HR organisation that was in place in the NOC until about two years ago.

Figure 3 Traditional HR Structure in the NOC until 2013



Swift (2012) had described this as the traditional integrated HR structure that is concerned with providing a full suite of service to Line managers and are structured to fit local business context. A lot of time is spent on basic and routine administration in these organisations. In terms of people utilisation and costs of HR services, they were not as efficient when compared to other shared services models (Reilly et al, 2007). HR Managers in the NOC report having control over a wider range of HR services. This eventually fell out of fashion in other affiliates as the Global HR function had started migrating services across regions to lower costs centres. The case for moving away from this HR structure was described by leaders of the NOC HR organisation as aligning with global best practises, meeting headcount efficiencies, leveraging availability of technology and a drive towards HR development:

“My objective is to get the team to focus on key HR issues of strategic importance and get out of lower value activities” NOC HR Leader

“With the global adoption of SAP systems which integrated procurement, finance and people data systems – the move towards global integration was inevitable and necessary to justify the investment”. UKOC HR Manager

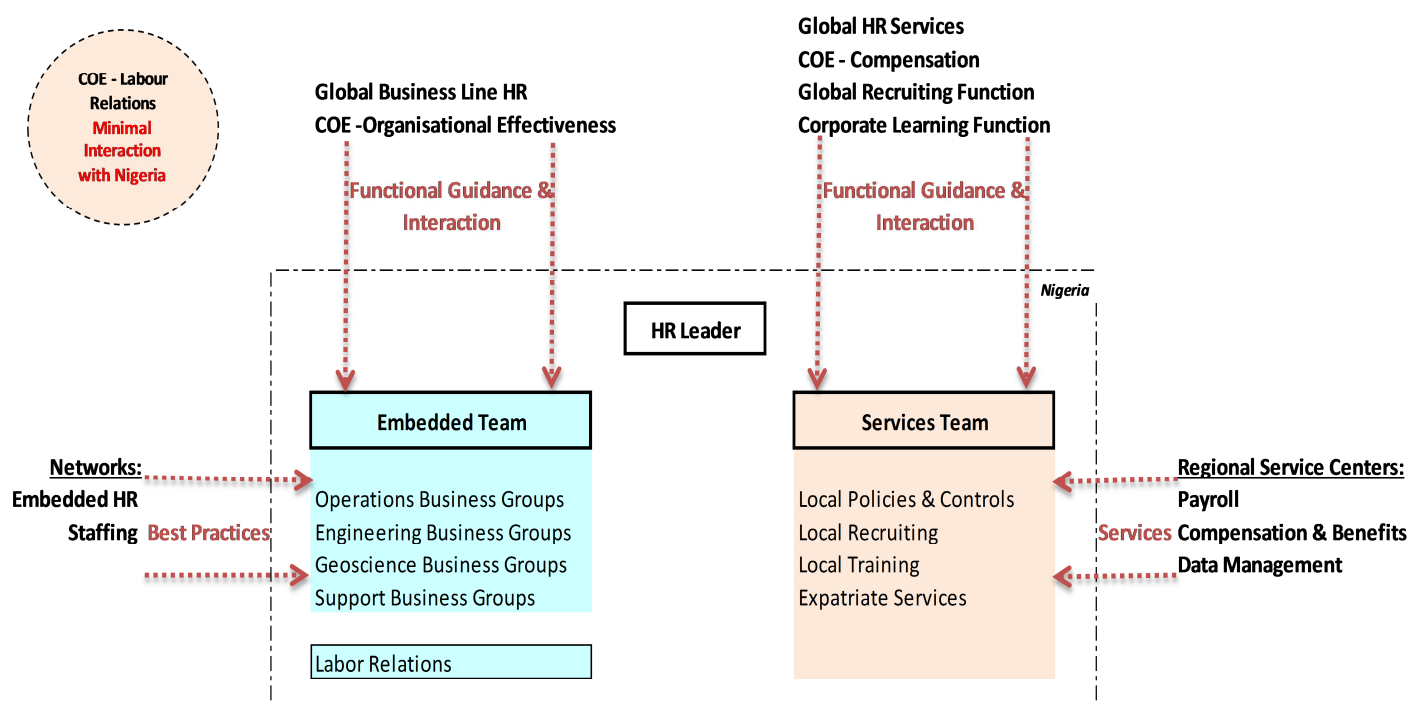
With the migration of backend services to lower costs centres, in-country HR resources then moved into direct frontline consulting roles as embedded HR Business partners. The descriptions of the new HR organisation fits an adaptation of the three-legged stool model (Ulrich 1997), with an in-country embedded team, a services team and Regional/Global support from Service Centres and CoE. This is shown in Figure 4 below. The Embedded team is led by a Senior Staffing Manager, with experienced HR advisors assigned to the various BLs. The number of HR Advisors assigned per BL is driven by the size, and with large groups like Operations and Engineering having 2-3 HR Advisors. The HR advisors are not functionally part of the BLs, but rather report to the Senior Staffing Manager. For the Operations group which is spread across multiple sites, the HR advisors are located in those sites with them.

The Services team was described as a connecting point between the regional service centres located in Asia and South America, and the Nigerian organisation. Internal powerpoint documents shared by the HR Managers during our discussion show that the service centres run monthly payroll, compensation and benefits and data management and interface directly with the Nigerian HR Service Manager and his team. There are designated HR Advisors that look after local policies and controls issues, coordinate local recruiting and training activities and provide Immigration support to Expatriates and Impatriates. The services group receives functional guidance from a range of corporate and regional HR functions, including the COEs for Compensation, the Corporate Learning function that ensures standardisation of training packages and delivery, as well as a Global recruiting function that ensures recruiting principles are consistently applied and stewarded. The HR Services Manager has functional accountabilities to the Global HR services line, while administratively reporting to the Country HR Leader. The accounts from the HR advisors point to how these changes have affected team dynamics and local accountabilities between the services team and the rest of the HR organisation. There is an increasing perception of detachment of the services team from the realities and priorities of the business:

“Since the change to embedded and services, I do not feel we function as a team anymore. The services team are more concerned about what their functional bosses think and all their KPIs reporting, rather than the real issues faced by the Embedded team or the BLs” NOC HR Advisor

“It’s fair to say there is some tension between Embedded and Services. The constant turf struggles puts a strain on all of us. We have to thread carefully” NOC HR Advisor

Figure 4 The Current HR Organisational Structure in the NOC



What is emerging in the NOC is that the shift in functional accountabilities to a separate, out of country HR organisation appears to be causing some anxiety amongst the HR Advisors, who are influenced by the prioritisation set by their respective Managers. Another interesting observation from the structural descriptions is that the LR function has a standalone Manager that reports to the Senior Staffing Manager. No HR Advisor directly supports LR activities, but the LR Manager interfaces with the other HR Managers. Although the corporation has a Regional LR

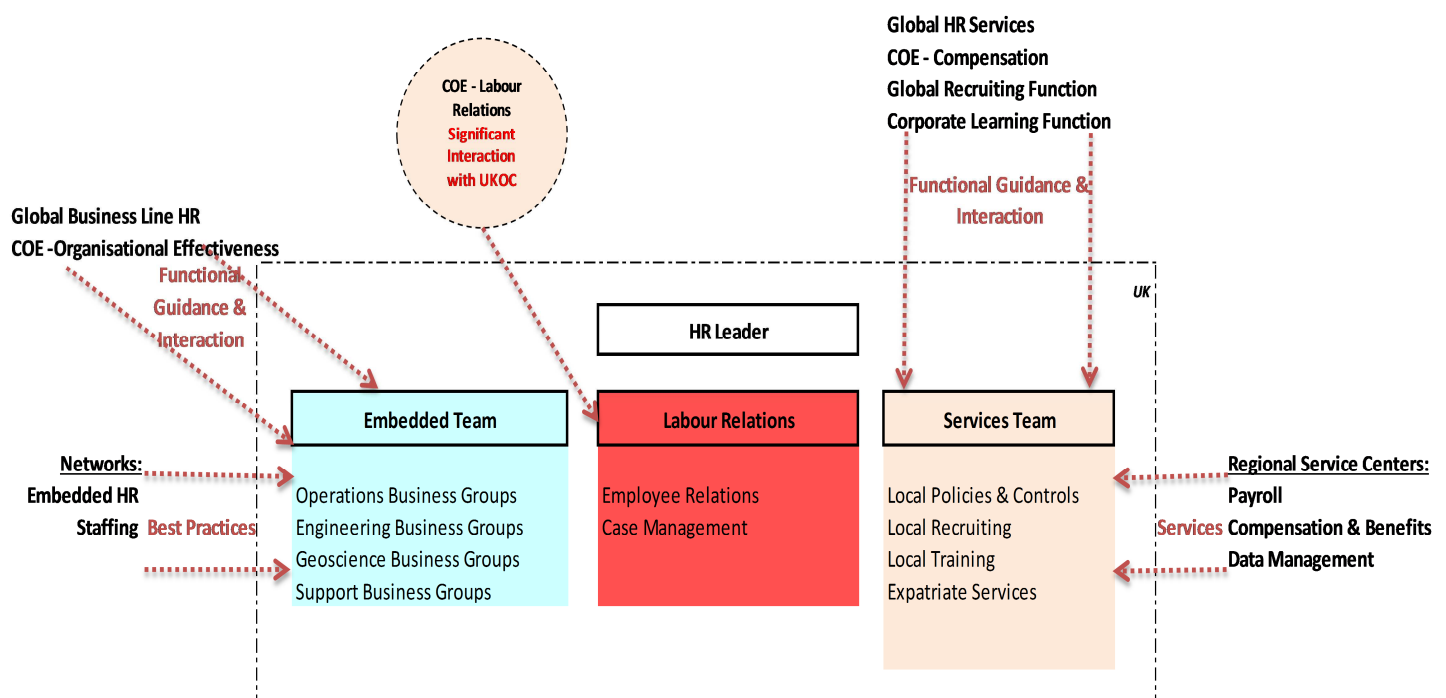
COE, there is minimal interaction between the COE and the Nigeria organisation. This is premised on the peculiar nature of LR in Nigeria relative to all other affiliates, and so historically, LR has been left fully to Nigeria HR to manage.

“Not a lot of people in the corporation understand the intricacies of Nigeria LR” NOC HR Manager

“We actively participate in a LR Network driven by the COE, where we continue to share trends and best practises. Nigeria and some of the newer venture organisations have yet to be rolled into these networks – as the LR issues are often local and specific” UKOC HR Manager

From the descriptions in the interviews of respondents in the UKOC, we find that the HR organisational structure is similar to what exist in other developed affiliates. Again, it is an adaptation of the three-legged stool model, as the embedded team receives direct functional guidance from the HR leader and interfaces with the Global BL HR function. It also receives consulting support from the OE COE. This COE group supports various affiliates on HR change projects and major structural people programmes. This is depicted in Figure 5 below. There is also active participation by the UK HR organisation in regional and global networks, similar to current practise in Nigeria. In comparison, the services organisation in the UK is significantly larger, because they have operated this model for over a decade and have over time consolidated services across Europe for economies of scale. A Senior Service Manager leads the function across Europe, with activities like Relocations, Payroll, Expatriate services, Policies and Controls all executed on a continental basis, with support from regional/global service transactional centers. The result is a high level of integration, efficiency and standardization across the European continent with interfaces that have been fine-tuned and perfected over the years. This provides an insight into what the Nigerian HR organisation could become, with opportunities for increased integration across the African/Middle Eastern continent based on proximity.

Figure 5 The Current HR Organisational Structure in the UKOC



Another critical distinction with the UKOC is that the LR function is significantly well resourced and there is an established process of non-union employee engagement through Information & Consultative (I&C) groups:

“The embedded team work closely with the Labour team, and leverage their support consistently in handling issues that come up within the business groups. Case issues in particular can be tricky, dealing with legislation, or discipline issues requires a lot of experience, particularly with the myriad of UK/European legislation to grapple with”
 UKOC HR Manager

“Our level of unionisation is low and limited mainly to the Operations and Maintenance technicians in some of our manufacturing sites. We therefore spend more time engaging actively with various Information & Consultative (I&C) groups across all business functions”
 UKOC HR Advisor

“Employees need to have a voice. If you do not provide that platform through I&Cs like we have done, then you will end up with possibly a disruptive Union”. UKOC HR Manager

These I&C meetings are facilitated by respective HR advisors who work under the guidance of the LR Manager, and with support from the LR Advisors. The UKOC LR Manager has a team of two advisors who focus on LR coordination and Case management. He reports to the UKOC HR Leader, and interfaces with the various BL HR Managers. HR Advisors hold quarterly consultative meetings within each of the BLs they support. The LR Manager develops the strategy and executes through the HR Advisors, by scripting their quarterly key messages and harnessing feedback and issues through them that requires intervention. There is also a significant amount of interaction between the UK LR function and the LR COE, with the UK playing a key role in sharing best practises in the European region that hinge on employee relations, communication, employee engagement, discipline and case management. So although the UKOC has a lower level of unionisation, there is a distinctly higher level of employee engagement which in the opinion of the UK HR practitioners, fosters cordial relations and improving employee commitment to the organisation. The NOC LR function did not participate in regional COEs and other LR networks, so they did not apply similar practises, rather relying primarily on union channels and union based meetings for bargaining and engagement.

“Our employee relations group is well resourced with competent HR advisors and a very experienced Manager, given how important it is to maintain cordial relations within the company” UKOC HR Manager

“Getting our LR right is the singular most important priority for the HR organisation and Company Leadership at this time. We should put our best people on this and be totally committed to a strategy that will position us to manage issues proactively and stay in control” NOC BL Manager

An issue emerging from the interviews and comparative review of practise in the UKOC is the resourcing level for LR in the NOC. There is only one LR Manager in an

organisation with over 2000 employees and 3000 other indirect personnel. 70% of the workforce is unionised, with significant time expended in managing labour issues that come up fairly regularly. The LR Manager does not have any supporting HR Advisors working directly with him, instead he reports to the Staffing Manager. His role therefore is more of a HR Advisor in charge of direct coordination of labour related issues, while the Staffing Manager discharges the more strategic elements of the LR Manager role. As a result, the rest of the organisation, including the union groups appear to be picking up confusing signals about who is really in charge of managing LR.

“Sometimes we are not sure if we should go to the LR manager or the Staffing Manager or the HR Leader. We usually have a direct line to the LR manager, but now that the LR Manager reports to another Manager before the HR Leader, we usually start from the Staffing Manager directly” NOC Union Leader

“We need clear and firm direction on who is driving LR and how we can work together as a team to manage our labour challenges” NOC HR Advisor

The Staffing Manager is heavily involved in staffing activities, leading a team that have been saddled with new embedded HR responsibilities that they are trying to understand. The apparent confusion to the BL and union that we see from interviews highlight the importance of ensuring clarity of roles in the LR function. The LR function in the organisational context of the NOC is significant enough to be a well-resourced role with full complement of staff, especially in a highly unionised organisation like this. However the lack of clarity in roles is not productive and the LR Manager role does not appear to have the appropriate status within the organisation.

4.2.7 The effectiveness of the LR function in in the NOC

From the interviews, I gathered that the LR function in the NOC used to have more resources and was a stand-alone function reporting to the HR Leader. This provided flexibility and empowered the LR function to discretionally drive programmes that

fostered more cordial LR. With the move towards the three legged stool HR model, the LR function was assessed as a predominantly embedded type activity and therefore subsumed within the Staffing function. This explains why the LR Manager reports to the Staffing Manager. However, what is obvious is that while this integration has taken place on a superficial level, there is no effective integration with the embedded role discharged by the HR advisors. The HR Advisors do not have the competencies or the support they require to handle labour issues that frequently arise out of their BLs. Issues of accountability for Labour relation issues also appear to be obscure.

“Part of my challenge is that I do not know a lot of what’s going on with the LR team, their union engagement and issues. So I’m not usually in a position to help my clients when a labour issue comes up” NOC HR Advisor

“When I look at the HR team today, there are only a few people that can help with labour issues and that is a problem” NOC BL Manager

The HR Managers affirm that the HR organisation was much larger than it is today, with a person/face to every facet of HR service, unlike today where a lot of service is provided from one of regional service centres in Asia or South America. The Union have indicated that they were not against technological advancements and the spread of globalisation, but in their opinion the HR organisation is now increasingly detached as there is no longer any personal connection, as everything was approached in a detached business-like manner.

“HR has lost its personality. We no longer have a face or a name to call for our HR issues, now you have to call someone in a different time-zone with a different accent to resolve your payroll questions” NOC Union leader

The discontinuation of proactive unilateral pay adjustments by management appear have alienated the union. As a result, the unions have channelled their energy towards ensuring firmer negotiations even if it means a labour crisis was the eventual

outcome. Clearly, the unions who do not seem keen on a structured negotiation process based on market or economic indices as an example, are reacting to the absence of a more paternalistic management which was more responsive, particularly with local pay and benefit adjustments

The LR manager coordinates quarterly meetings with the Union leaders at least once a quarter. A labour forum is also held about twice each year, which has the company leadership led by the Managing Director holding a business update meeting with the Union. In the field locations, the smaller labour meetings with the chapter unions are held with the site HR embedded teams, and where issues are not resolved in those chapter meetings they get escalated to the Union branch, who typically brings this up with the Staffing Manager. There are therefore multiple parties handling different parts of NOC LR in a disjointed manner.

“Everything we do for our clients’ flows from our Manager, including LR. He has made it clear that LR in the Field should be handled by us. So we do not always involve the LR Manager. I’m not sure he (LR Manager) even wants to get involved” NOC HR Advisor

The interview responses indicate that the Issues of accountability and responsibility for LR are blurred. The HR Advisors are cautious about who they approach for LR support, or what LR function they discharge within the BLs. The Unions also confirmed that they are confused about which Manager to discuss their labour issues with, and in the face of that uncertainty they go to the higher status Manager as that bolsters the importance of the issue for them, and probably enhances the chances of resolution. The LR Manager is not fully empowered in this context and his influence is significantly limited.

“I have access to the field HR manager and the LR Manager as well. The LR Manager is in Lagos, and rarely gets involved with field issues. We do not particularly go the LR Manager as much, he is usually only interested in big issues that will involve senior management, so not always very helpful” NOC Union Leader

"I deal more directly with the HR Leader or the Staffing Manager on LR matters. They are very accessible" NOC Business Leader

"I think we all work fairly OK with the LR Manager, but that doesn't mean he should tell me what to do. We all report to the same Manager, so it's not a Supervisor-subordinate relationship" NOC HR Advisor

The Unions have confirmed that they go to the more senior manager as this guarantees them the appropriate attention for their issues. The union is very sensitive to status of the Management staff they engage with and confirmed that they are not used to having the LR Manager being a lower level manager within the HR organisation. They make reference to other industry operators who have very senior LR managers with comparable high status, and so they find the changes in the NOC HR organisation a bit confusing. This issue also came up in reviews with senior Business Managers, who again default to senior status HR managers to help them deal with their labour problems. HR Advisors also recognise this distinction in status and respond appropriately to it, by limiting their full cooperation with the LR Manager unless directed otherwise by a more senior HR Manager. The LR Manager is not viewed as a Manager with senior status, thereby limiting his ability to execute the national LR strategy.

Although I find evidence of engagement with the union, it is mostly driven by collective agreements that outline the structure and frequency of meetings, and the subject of those meetings. Everything appeared to be bound by collective agreements. These include the quarterly JCC meetings, the periodic labour forum with senior management and the annual wage negotiations with the union leaders.

"We get more information about what is happening in the company or about new policies from the union" NOC Union Member

“When new programmes are introduced or policies are amended, it is the union that we usually hear from first, before even HR comes to educate or even share any information. I tend to trust the Union about what may be good or suspicious about any change”. NOC Employee/Union Member

“We have to remember that they are employees first before they even become members of any union or association. So we must always stay engaged with all employees, unionised or not“ UKOC HR Manager

The subsequent burden of communicating to about 1500 (out of 2000) employees is left entirely to the Union who deliver these messages in ways that reinforces their relevance. There is no evidence of a strategy of effective employee engagement and communication, particularly Union employees. The NOC LR structure does not enhance the connection with a broader base of employees, nor is the function executed proactively to engage. This is inconsistent with practise in the UKOC where I&C groups are used effectively and regularly as a means of employee communication. In the NOC, direct employee communication and engagement is limited to the smaller group of non-unionised employees and this also does not happen in a structured or fairly regular manner.

4.2.8 The role of Business Manager and Supervisors in LR Management

“BL should be active in engaging their workforce. We need help with the FLS and SLS; they need more exposure on how to engage their employees. From what I’ve heard, some of the supervisors in our sites are very controlling and imposing, and this approach doesn’t work with employees today” NOC BL Manager

The issues identified in the NOC point to an organisation that is making progress in implementing HRM, but there are still concerns about the ability of Managers and supervisors to engage their employees. The restructured embedded team focuses mainly on supporting the business leaders. On a strategic level, the BL leaders also participate in other meetings with the HR leaders, so there is more alignment at

senior levels in the organisation. The HR advisors however, rarely spend time directly with the middle level Managers and supervisors, except if there are specific problems. This trend is common in prior research and literature. Renwick (2003), Marchington (2008) and Reilly (2007) point out how HRM is more attuned to the needs of employers and have overtime relinquished the traditional employee advocacy role. The NOC has just gone through a major reorganisation of the HR organisation, moving away from the traditional personal management bureaucratic structures, into an adaptation of the three-legged stool delivery structure. The interviews indicate that HR is still grappling to find its true place within the organisation and come to terms with its new direction:

“In hindsight, I think we needed to have been very clear about the accountability of the services groups to the HR function in-country, and more importantly to the business. I have seen some indications of a disconnect from what is important locally and what the Services Manager wants to drive” NOC HR Leader

“We have just moved to the embedded & services structure and it is still forming. Not perfect, but still think it’s a step in the right direction. We just need to figure out how to optimise the capability of our HR folks and their availability across the business” NOC HR Manager

“You can’t rely entirely on HR – our employees work for us and we see them most of the time. I think part of the problem is that the BL waits for HR to solve their labour problems, and HR thinks it is the ultimate saviour of our LR problems” NOC BL Manager

Apart from its internal norming issues, there are also evidence of misalignment between the HR organisation and the BL Managers following the recent change. The BL Managers have an expectation that HR will continue to coordinate the people issues they have been handling for them. HR on the other hand wants the BL to pick up more people management activities. There are also signals that the change management process has not resulted in a cohesive HR team function as even the BL managers are able to decipher the apparent discord within the embedded and

services team in the new HR organisation. Part of this shift in alignment is attributable to a change in priorities, as the services team is more concerned with KPIs and functionally answer to a global services Manager who stewards them similar to other affiliates. In contrast, the embedded team is more attuned with local influences from BL Managers and so have different priorities.

“The HR restructuring process is in progress, as you can tell there are some service problems that have occurred recently – and you can see how the Services and Embedded Managers are pulling in separate directions. So when we have labour problems, you struggle to find the right support and your response is in most cases reacting to what has happened, rather than good anticipation and strategic coordination” NOC BL Manager

Following the implementation of more HRM practises, the BL Managers expressed concern about their ability to handle the incremental people activities they now have responsibility for, and more importantly, how to manage labour issues. For an organisation with over 70% of its employee unionised, it is no surprise that this is a reoccurring concern across all levels of organisational leadership. The BL Managers also clearly expressed the need to empower their frontline Managers and supervisors on handling LR issues and needed HR support in doing this. Although there are supervisor and leadership programmes that are designed to help managers develop leadership competencies, the nuances of local union dynamics and LR management did not appear to be specifically covered in a structured form.

“I’m concerned about the level of competence I have in the front line. The union tries to interfere on some of our operational sites, challenging supervisors and inciting noncompliance. This needs to stop and where we should start is helping our managers and supervisors understand LR and how to manage employee relation dynamics. That’s where I need HR’s help” NOC BL Manager

The lack of HR connection with employees, supervisors and Managers lower in the organisation appears to be creating a gap in supervisor/managerial competency in effectively engage employees. This is evident in the NOC where Supervisor LR

development was not prioritised. Managers are therefore failing to connect with their employees, and this is creating a vacuum that is filled by the Union:

“But our members in various groups still complain about some clear violations of CBA agreements by their supervisors. I think our supervisors and managers need to be properly educated on our agreements. They do not know what to do, or even care sometimes. And that’s where the problems start from...if only these issues are handled properly by supervisors, they it would not even make its way to the union”
NOC Union leader

“I do not want to go to the union over something in my group that me and my supervisor can resolve. But if my supervisor will not support me, and I do not even have HR available to provide guidance – then what’s the point” NOC Employee/Union member

The concerns about frontline supervisory capacity to manage employee issues that arise were also expressed by other respondents. The Unions highlight the dictatorial tendencies of supervisors, particularly those in remote locations. BL managers on the other hand were concerned about the mishandling of policy matters by some of their middle level managers and supervisors. In discussions with HR, it appears that some appointments to supervisory positions were made without adequate training and coaching about job expectations, including specific coaching on LR.

“On our site, the first line supervisors and offshore managers can be very dictatorial. Most of them, who grew up under the old system have a commander like mentality for their location and always believe in bullying and ordering people around. We have challenged them, and they have to get used to union officials challenging some of their despotic practises” NOC Union leader

“Our business and labour strategy must be aligned. To do so, we need to get our Supervisors and Managers on our side and equip them with the right training and support to handle the difficult questions they get from their employees, but more

importantly to become advocates for some of these efficiency initiatives” NOC HR leader

From the interviews, I found that the level of engagement between HR advisors and supervisors and middle managers was limited. Their efforts were focused mainly on senior BL leaders and the limited LR capabilities of the HR advisors constrain their ability to quickly intervene in these labour issues. As a result, Supervisors ignore or bully their way through concerns expressed by the employees, who in turn, eventually channel their issues to the union leaders. The Supervisors also did not always feel empowered as the Union leaders were often more informed about policy changes or issues of interest. This is because NOC management focused on engaging the Unions as required in collective agreements, but did not have a structured process for sharing information with supervisors. The overall findings point to significant gaps in the ability of the Supervisors and Managers to effectively manage LR issues within their functions.

4.2.9 HR Advisors/Business Partners contribution to LR management

“I’ve struggled to understand the expectation in my new job. On one hand they say I’m fully dedicated to my business groups, yet on the other hand they want me to handle some of the compensation and planning activities I used to do. It’s like things are still moving around, and I’m not sure it’s making a lot of sense yet” NOC HR Advisor

The principal justification for the three legged stool model is that it enables HR to become strategic by focusing on the efficient execution of services, the provision of real-time consulting, change management and people management support to BL managers. Marchington (2008) highlighted how important the Business partner role is in driving efficient people management decisions across the business. They connect the HR organisation with Management, including front line Managers and supervisors. The NOC in adapting this model has moved previous HR generalists and some additional services personnel into new embedded HR advisor roles. From

the Interview accounts of the HR managers as well as documents they shared during the discussion, there are a total of eight embedded HR advisors and two Managers. The experience level within the HR advisor population range from three to ten years, and most of them have held one or two jobs prior to this job. Their prior roles have all been in-country, in well-defined generalist or HR Services roles. They have therefore not worked in a three-legged structured HR organisation prior to the recent changes. It is no surprise that they have approached this with some apprehension and confusion about their roles and are not sure how to consult and create value for their new business groups.

“I’ve had to ask my Manager what exactly I should be doing now, and he said I should find out from my business clients what they need from me, then I can find solutions. But I’m not sure what solutions I should be considering or how to apply them. I sometimes feel really flustered” NOC HR Advisor

The embedded HR advisors were unsure about how much discretion they could exercise or support in certain situations. This problem was identified by Pritchard (2010) who found that during the transition to more strategic HR partnering roles, HR professionals struggled to find their identity. They were often unsure about how to interface within HR and with their clients, and found it challenging to let go of their key skill areas and embrace the rather gigantic world of Organisational development and consulting. In the NOC, the HR Advisors confirmed they are learning as they go along, and did not feel that the LR Managers understood some of what they were supposed to be doing differently. They also felt like they have more workload than expected. The services team that handle operational items like Compensation, Benefit administration and Recruiting, continue to leverage on the embedded HR contacts for validation, coordination or verification with line managers.

“We should have done better during the change management to provide more clarity to our HR Advisors on what they need to do in their roles” NOC HR Manager

“Anytime I have a labour issue, I simply reach out to the LR Manager or one of my colleagues. More than a year after we have changed the structure I rely heavily on them because of my limited experience in these matters: NOC HR Advisor

There is also no broad consulting or OE experience within the HR advisor team, and so they have to rely heavily on the OE COE for issues that they are supposed to be able to handle. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) had highlighted the problems of properly defining the boundaries and interfaces between the various local and internal HR groups in the three-legged stool model. This is usually a problem for both HR practitioners as well as the receiving BL managers, who have to deal with multiple HR contacts. Part of the issues raised by the HR Advisors is the lack of clarity about their roles, and the Managers confirmed that the entire change management process was not very clear because no one was certain at that time how it will work. The fact that no one has actually worked in an embedded organisation appear to limit their ability to effectively adapt to the new structure.

“It’s very confusing, I now interface with the COE, internal HR, my business clients and at the same time the regional and local service centres who need to provide one service or the other to my clients and want me to connect them or be involved. I feel there are no limits to my role” NOC HR Advisor

“I do not feel I always get the help I need from my Manager on my consulting work with my clients. His speciality is Compensation not so much OE., so I have to leverage on contacts within our new embedded networks” NOC HR Advisor

There are indications that the problems around role descriptions, role boundaries and interfaces are improving as the various members of the HR team get used to their roles. The HR advisors are leveraging embedded networks and other external contacts to develop consulting and OE competencies needed for their role. The challenge of understanding the range of interfaces in an embedded three legged stool model, usually gets better with time, but needs to be fine-tuned continually to get the best performance results (CIPD, 2007).

“When I look at the HR team today, there are only a few people that can help with labour issues and that is a problem. I also do not see a clear cut plan on how you are developing more people who have gotten their hands dirty on negotiations such that the capabilities are spread broadly” NOC BL Manager

“One of the things I noticed in my new embedded role is how little Managers and Supervisors knew about how to manage LR within their teams”. NOC HR Advisor

Most of the HR advisors have not had direct experience in managing LR issues in the NOC. All others have only observed the issues at arm’s length and have had no direct role in the union engagement, negotiations or periodic labour meetings. They have no significant networks within the Union leadership team and so are not positioned to be able to handle any labour issues that come up in their client groups.

“A lot of my success today as an embedded HR Advisor is directly linked to my experiences as an Industrial Relations Advisor for two years. I know who to reach, I am familiar with the tactics and nothing the union does is surprising. This helps me in advising my clients and also in relating back within the HR team” NOC HR Advisor

“Our HR professionals all need to have a stint at LR, because they are confronted by it – but only a few have been exposed to the principles, the processes and even how to help the Business respond” NOC HR Manager

“There will be significant benefit to the organisation if all the HR Advisors were competent and empowered to handle LR issues and be a strong company advocate. However, we have a huge gap and I’m not sure how we can begin to close it” NOC HR Manager

Information gathered from the interviews show that prior experience in LR is very valuable for HR advisors who have to support the BL managers. These HR advisors tend to have good networks; good understanding of LR nuances and are more confident about handling general HR issues that they may encounter. Overall, they

felt more effective in their roles and were able to add more value and interface appropriately with other business functions. The value of this experience was recognised by HR and BL Managers alike, with the HR Managers suggesting that a development plan which involved a deliberate exposure to LR experience early in their careers will be beneficial to the HR function and the organisation in general. However, at the time of this study there was no evidence of any plans put in place to drive this early development of LR competencies. The HR organisation it seems was still settling into its new role. The HR Advisors have started developing their contacts with other embedded teams and they were effectively learning on the job as they go. Overtime, it is possible they will gain enough experience to be able to add better value to the business but without a proactive approach towards staffing and development of these key resources, the HR organisation may not achieve its optimal potential.

4.2.10 Other findings impacting LR

"I think we are stuck with the union for a long time to come. It is in our interest to find a way to work effectively with them and partner through our major challenges. This is where we need HR's help the most" NOC BL Manager

"We recognise that management has the right to run the business. We only want to help and protect our members. We also want to help along the way, because if the company does well, we do well too" NOC Union Leader

From the interview accounts, the Union had examples of working well in certain situations with the organisation. It is pragmatic that the NOC continues to pursue programmes that will improve cooperation with this major stakeholder. Despite the significant labour challenges, management representatives and union leaders seem interested in cooperating better with the other party. They both recognise that they will continue to be in business together and although they both guard their interests, there is a genuine expression of their readiness to compromise if it will positively advance mutual interests.

Issues of Contractor Utilisation appear to be a major concern in the Industry and to the Unions as well. The Unions feel that Contractors were unfairly treated as their pay levels are not comparable to what regular employees earn. This is causing dissatisfaction amongst the workers.

“The Unionisation of Contractor worker is a LR monster that we have been grappling with. We have made progress with the Ministry of Labour, the OPTS and the Unions in the last few months on defining regulations to streamline how these contracts are managed and their approach to LR. Much still remains to be done. We are committed to complying with labour regulations, but the Unions have to do the same and recognise our fundamental right to manage” NOC HR Leader

“We believe in equal pay for equal work, and will resist efforts by industry operators to casualise the work of our members under the guise of service contracts” NOC Union leader/National Union leader

The HR Managers report that a number of the labour problems they have managed recently are linked to contractor unionisation. There is more reliance on contractor resources to increase flexibility and manage rising costs of hiring permanent workers. The Union has picked up on this trend within the Industry and has been agitating against the issue. On one hand, the Union leaders report that declining employment levels is leading to a reduction in their membership as well as funding from check-off dues. As a coping strategy, the union has been aggressively unionising contractor workers and trying to standardise negotiation practises with their employers. These efforts are resulting in significant labour problems amongst the contractor companies who are smaller employers with less capacity to manage these new challenges. HR managers have to intervene when sometimes contractor labour actions are carried out in their premises. Given the scale of contractor personnel in the industry and the disparate nature that the unionisation drive is going, the issue has become a major area of concern for all parties.

From the interviews, the Union leaders express disappointment that HR was not actively stopping these practises, but rather collaborated with the BL towards exploring creative ways to avoid providing long-term career employment for capable and qualified employees. The National and local unions have made contractor welfare issues their priority and there are clear linkages with internal relations. On the other hand, both the unions and HR Managers complain about limited support from the Ministry of Labour in regulating this issue. Although basic regulations are in place, they do not address all the concerns that are emerging as this issue escalates. At the time of this study, further reviews by the Industry employers association, the OPTS on how to advocate for improved regulation with the Government were planned. However, the prospects for resolution remained low.

Another issue that emerged from the union leaders had to do with expatriate utilisation. Information from the HR group had indicated that as a multinational, the organisation had expatriates who were on international assignment in the NOC. This is common in the Industry, with expatriate utilisation ranging from 5-15%. The sentiments expressed by the Union leaders are associated with the prolonged stay of these expatriates in the NOC. There is a general expectation that the expats who typically will come from more developed affiliates play a key role in mentoring and developing local competencies. However, in some cases global technical experts have remained in their local roles for longer than 5 years. Feedback from the HR Managers indicates that there is a dearth of skill, especially technical skill that requires the utilisation of these expats for much longer. In addition, Nigeria is not usually a desirable location for expatriates and so the organisation encourages those who are available to remain much longer and contribute to local technical development. The Union leaders on the other hand do not feel that the transfer of technical knowledge is happening fast enough, or where it has taken place the expats do not want to leave. They feel that a number of key leadership positions that can be occupied by their members have been taken by expatriates.

In response to sustained agitation by the Union and in line with its objectives of driving more local participation in the Industry, the Government had in 2010 issued

new legislation with prescribed National content targets for all operators. These were targets in staffing, contracting, resourcing and domestic fabrication. The Unions have welcomed this as support for their agitation, and have used this as a platform to push for reviews that are more stringent by Management. HR Managers confirmed that assuring workers of commitment to National development, complying with government prescribed targets, and driving the principles of multiculturalism in a multinational is turning out to be a challenging aspect of their roles. Overall, the issue of Expatriate utilisation is complicated with linkages to factors outside the NOC's control, such as legislation and Government regulation. The direct linkage with LR within the scope of this research was not clear. This can be investigated further in a separate related study.

4.3 Discussion of Study Findings and Conclusions

Issues of employee engagement and the empowerment of supervisors and managers to play a more effective role in LR Management, form the crux of the issues arising. When I think back to my experiences within the organisation as a HR Manager involved in developing and executing aspects of the Labour strategy, what is pertinent is that our focus then tended to be how to mitigate the influence of the Union and move the HR organisation towards standard global HR practise. We wanted to spend less time managing LR or dealing with Union issues like other developed affiliates, which in hindsight seems somewhat ignorant of the labour circumstances of our business. The Union was often characterised in negative light, as trying to selfishly advance its aims. This study has provided me the ability to reflect upon this characterisation, with the benefit of seeing things from the perspective of the Union leaders and employees. I now feel that this characterisation was unreasonable, as there are genuine anxieties felt by employees and the union that have motivated their behaviour. The ability to gain this kind of insight in real-time, within the actual labour situation is mostly lacking, especially in a highly unionised workplaces. My first realisation from this study is that HR practitioners need to be adept at reflexivity, to see the different perspectives of other key stakeholders and better understand the underlying motivations behind their actions.

In the literature review we had considered the various factors that determine a cooperative or coercive labour strategy as identified by Abbott (2007). We can contrast elements of LR practise between the UKOC and NOC within that framework. The two affiliates are clearly in different stages of development and a direct comparison needs to be mindful of the organisational differences. However, if we consider that the NOC is seeking to implement similar organisational structures with other developed affiliates, mainly an adaptation of the three legged stool model, then the value in learning from such comparative context is clear.

The NOC recognizes the right of the union to represent employees, backed by legislation and well established in National LR structures/institutions. In such situations, Abbott (2007) framework suggests a management-union alliance strategy may be a good fit. The UKOC has a lower level of Unionization, mostly amongst the technicians. Where Unions are present, the company recognizes the right to organize. The UKOC adopts a more management directed strategy in negotiations, given the weaker union base. Nonetheless, what came through from the interviews is that some level of consultation still takes place with the objective of informing, rather than bargaining.

In the NOC, disputes are resolved through negotiations, consultation with employees and the involvement of regulatory trade dispute institutions. Based on responses from the HR Managers, the regulatory trade dispute process are not very effective and this further makes the case for building cooperative relationship with the unions based on Abbott's (2007) framework. In the UKOC, disputes are also resolved through negotiations and consultations with employees. There is an effective trade dispute process, which is rarely used. As a result, management has more discretion about the extent of consultation it plans to have with the unions. A number of factors within the NOC point to the strategic influence wielded by the union. They play a key part in determining the state of LR in the NOC, and are keenly aware of their power and how to secure their base.

Reflecting further upon this, with an active membership of over 70%, legislative support for unionisation, and an established collective bargaining process, it is unlikely that a coercive LR strategy will be successful in the NOC. Strategies that will preserve the right to manage and allow a non-disruptive framework for working productively with the union is a prudent way to go. My recent experiences in the UKOC have shown me that Management even in developed climes continue to prefer a non-unionised workplace. This is a common sentiment within the Industry. Union recognition which is backed by legislation has been foisted upon the business and recent challenges within the Oil and gas sector occasioned by declining commodity prices is highlighting the disruptive nature of union presence. The strategies that are deployed are intended to continue to strengthen the employee - employer contract through active communication, pay for performance, and effective grievance resolution processes. The key difference with the NOC is not necessarily the stage of maturity, but rather the unusually disruptive nature of the Union occasioned by external contextual factors that have made them powerful in the larger economy. Those issues continue to seep through the organisational labour climate and have over time entrenched a combative culture in the workforce.

The common element therefore appears to be the external factors on the business and the Labour climate. These include legislation, economics and Government influence, amongst others. What my comparative experiences have demonstrated in the context of this study is that those external influences play a very significant role in the state of LR. In the UK, historical changes in legislation and workplace practices pursued by Government created a more evenly balanced state of power. The Unions are relatively restrained in how they pursue their bargaining interests. In contrast, the Unions continue to wield significant power in Nigerian Oil industry and are able to create serious business disruptions with minimal consequences. HR practitioners have to become better at understanding these external influences, and how to manage the employee and organisational impact effectively.

The next subsections, evaluate the key findings in relation to findings from the Literature review and LR experiences within the NOC.

4.3.1 Understanding the Union mind-set and their engagement strategies

The declining trust in Management and the implementation of some HRM practises such as forced performance ranking, strengthened unionisation. This is consistent with findings by Bryson (2001) who established higher trust in Management where employees perceived a balance in power between the unions and management. Where there is support for Unionisation by Management, trust levels were reported to have improved. In the NOC, the implementation of HRM practises were interpreted as management attempts at eroding the influence of the Union. Holland et al (2012) found that employees in organisations with effective voice-arrangements, tended to have more trust in the management. In the NOC, the increase in employment insecurity has led to increased unionisation. This runs counter to general notions about HRM practises improving organisational performance. What this demonstrates is that not all HRM practises are suitable for an organisation. The NOC will need to evaluate within its business context what will advance its interest and improve workplace performance.

Mergers are significantly risky business activities and HRM practises associated with mergers can have long-lasting impact on organisations. “Mergers provide fertile ground for job insecurity, unfair treatment and procedural injustice, as boards and senior management seek to quickly realize efficiencies and increase shareholder value “(Bryson, 2003). Mergers can sometimes underestimate the potential for union reaction and often do not properly engage the workforce or the unions as part of their change management plans. The introduction of HRM practises such as forced performance ranking may have further aggravated issues. This system of relative performance management and a systemic removal of the ‘bottom performers’ was made popular by Jack Welch in General Electric (Grote, 2005). This performance management system has however been criticised for its propensity for rater bias (Klores, 1966), problems associated with fostering teamwork, and a negative impact on employee commitment (Guralnik, 2004; Blume et al, 2009). Guralnik (2004) recommended a cultural assessment to determine the nature of application of fixed distribution performance systems to ensure it succeeds and motivates performance,

rather than alienate employees. If we relate this back to earlier discussions about how HRM is implemented either by external, internal or configurational fit (Huselid 1995; Becker et al, 1997; Guest, 1997), this then becomes an example where a high performance HRM practise has not impacted the organisation positively. This reinforces the point, that the implementation of HRM must be based on alignment with business objectives.

Freeman and Kliener (1998) in their study on union behaviours found that while unions will seek to maximise pay and benefits, possibly to the point whereby the expansion of the firm is compromised, they will rarely push the organisation to insolvency. They often recognise that the fortunes of their members are directly linked to how well the organisation performs and so they know when to rein things in – and support management initiatives. There is however an emerging need in the NOC to look into how to win the hearts and minds of the workforce and seek to restore trust in Management. Employee engagement practises and the concept of union- management cooperation should form part of the LR strategy for the organisation in the long-run. Guest (1989) had highlighted the challenges with HRM which primarily strengthens the relationship between individual employees and organisation, and may not be readily amenable to group representation. However, HRM need not be anti-union (Holland et al, 2012; Blackard, 2000) and part of HRM objectives are to drive effective employee engagement strategies, and the need to factor in organisational context. Union involvement can contribute to workplace and employment stability (Bryson, 2003) so it is therefore an organisational responsibility to leverage the opportunity.

In their analysis of Union Power strategies, Lévesque & Murray (2010) pointed out how Unions seek to engage and keep the attention of their members by utilising multiple channels of engagement. They identified internal solidarity and effective networking as key power resources for unions, amongst other factors. Nothing is apparently off limits as unions will often be ready to engage constantly, aggressively if need be, embellish facts, escalate, understate, politicise or connect emotionally with the truth, all with the objective of ensuring an active and sustained followership.

“There is a political dimension to the way the internet is approached which means that it raises possibilities for groups of trade unionists and a broader range of activity beyond the formal remit of trade union hierarchy. The democratic potential of such developments should not be underplayed” (Martínez Lucio and Walker, 2005, p.138). The usual lack of boundaries to how far union leaders will typically go to engage their members tend to give them an edge over other more conventional methods of communication adopted by Managers, Supervisors and the HR organisation.

Martínez Lucio (2003) in her study of Spanish unions found that they are quick to adapt to new technologies such as the internet and social media, and quickly leverage these mediums to engage and communicate with their targeted audience. From my experience in NOC LR, I am familiar with how the Union was effective in disseminating information, however the extent to which the unions have deployed technology is frankly surprising. In hindsight, I do not think we have considered the Union as an organisation or its leaders to be technologically savvy, and this may be because a number of their previous leaders were not quick adopters but rather had good effective networks across various groups. However, thinking further about this, I realise that a number of their new leaders and delegates are actually of a younger demographic, and it should therefore not be surprising how they tactically deploy technology in employee engagement.

A key learning from this is that that technology will play increasingly significant role in employee communication, and any effective labour strategy should have a clear technology deployment plan to appeal to the growing base of employees who tune to such channels. In a highly unionised workplace like the NOC, this mode of engagement provided upward feedback to the Unions and was an effective source of power. The Union thrives primarily on information gathering and sharing. Bronfenbrenner and Hickey (2004) in their review of Union organising strategies, identified that a crucial element of successful union recruitment rests on tactics such as person to person contacts inside and outside the workplace, inter – organisational networking, industry comparative studies and debates, and galvanising emotive issues. By ensuring it stays connected with its members who invariably work in all

departments of the organisation, the union is able to stay keenly aware of new developments, trends and quickly adapt its strategy based on possible impact on its members and the long-term sustainability of the union.

4.3.2 Managing annual negotiations

We learn from the data that there is no industrial negotiation in the Nigerian oil industry; rather individual annual negotiations amongst a small comparator group have led to an escalation of wages. Fells (2003) had identified how individual negotiations can improve the quality of management-union relations and allow organisations to influence bargaining outcomes consistent with their broad philosophies and compensation preferences. However, he did not account for how this approach can be detrimental in a competitive situation where the Union wields considerable influence as is applicable in the Nigerian upstream oil Industry situation. If the group of companies negotiated as a group/industry, then the Union's negotiation influence may be mitigated. Abbott (2007, p.3) explained that such individual negotiation approaches "can encourage the growth and influence of trade unions within the decisional processes of an organisation such that securing industrial peace becomes a more important goal than achieving business objectives" (Ibid, p.3).

Kizilos and Reshef(1997) highlighted how unionised firms were more internally regulated as collective agreements are put in place by parties to guide bargaining, negotiations, trade dispute resolution and other key change management issues. This description fits the experience in the NOC where annual bargaining is very cumbersome because the union wants everything documented and then seeks to renegotiate at the next opportunity. This has had the effect of growing the list of items that are bargained each year, thereby making annual bargaining more intense and difficult. In comparison, the UKOC also hold individual negotiations which occur less frequently. A key difference is the non-formal mode of consultation that holds in the UKOC which serves as a platform to resolve all key concerns and generate input to future changes initiatives. This makes the bargaining less contentious when they

hold, as only broad parameters on pay are reviewed at that point. The practise of consultation is common in LR circles and is often recommended as a progressive strategy that drives cordial employee relations (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Lockwood, 2007).

Reflecting further on my recent involvement in I&C meetings in the UKOC, I have gained a better understanding of how the consultation approach can enhance HRM success, as Managers have a first-hand opportunity to listen to employees and address any concerns. In contrast, all energy in the NOC is geared towards annual negotiations where the unions usually have a large exclusive list. This is complemented by quarterly JCC meetings with the Union leaders, which are less effective as significant pay items are already reserved for annual bargaining. In all cases, the engagement and negotiations hold with the Union leaders, not with employees as it happens in the I&C meetings. The Union remain the main connection to the broad representation of employees in the NOC, and therefore they can manage the messaging to their benefit. We however did not pay much attention to this gap in communication, but were rather keener on preventing any work disruptions arising from a labour dispute. Clearly, there is a need to establish an effective structure for employee engagement, and diffuse the amount of energy and importance associated with annual negotiations. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) had pointed out that it is possible to collaborate with the union, and yet continue to engage effectively with the broader employee base. Communicating changes and addressing concerns mainly through the union, appears to reinforce the Union's power and importance and makes the organisation vulnerable in terms of employee engagement.

4.3.3 The HR organisational structure and the effectiveness of LR Management

There is strong evidence of how technology and globalisation has influenced significant change in the NOC HR organisation. This is consistent with findings from other research which looked at organisation trends in HR delivery systems (Ulrich, 1997; Caldwell, 2001; Joinson, 1999, CIPD, 2007, Swift, 2012). We learn from the HR

Managers in the NOC that the HR systems were moved over from a local standalone PeopleSoft system to a globally integrated system – SAP, which included other functions like Finance and Procurement. The organisation then started to migrate backend and transactional services to global service centers. This movement had already progressed more than a decade ago in bigger more matured affiliates like the UK, US and Canada, and were starting to reach other emerging market affiliates like Nigeria. What this meant was that the backend services of people data entry and processing, could now be performed from anywhere in the world. Given the relative higher wage costs and challenges of the Nigerian operating environment, it made sense to move repetitive, non-discretionary activities to the service centres.

The change in accountabilities and functional reporting lines had an impact on team dynamics, particularly between the embedded and services teams. From review of literature, there are common problems with boundary management when structural changes occur in HR organisation. Problems in team effectiveness and alignment commonly arise as part of the transition to the three-legged model (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014; Reilly et al, 2007). This has been associated with unclear expectations and ineffective change management when HR organisations adopt this model. Additionally, organisations sometimes do not spend enough time figuring out what adaptation of the model will be more suitable for their situational contexts (CIPD, 2007). As a result, new teams struggle to understand how the interfaces are supposed to work. The findings in the NOC align with these observations from research, and the challenges in NOC HR can be attributed to ineffective change management. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) recommended that boundary and accountability issues should be promptly and decisively addressed, and continually fine-tuned as the organisation norms into shape.

We also see how following the adaption of the three legged stool model in the NOC, that the LR function became subsumed in the staffing function. Unlike the practise in other developed affiliates who participate in LR networks and get support from LR COE, the NOC LR function appears entirely isolated with minimal exchange with other affiliates. The HR managers explained that the high unionisation levels in

Nigeria made it very distinct within the global HR function, so local labour issues were mostly left to local HR to manage. Comparing this with practise in the UKOC, this isolation has contributed to the non-adoption of best practises on employee engagement and consultation by the Nigeria LR functions, which incidentally are crucial elements of a sustainable LR strategy. Additionally, I did not find evidence of a conscious development of global resources/skill set towards managing some of these peculiar labour issues in emerging markets. There are also issues of resourcing and interface with the LR function that emanated from the reviews. There is only a Manager who has no direct authority with the other HR Advisors. The involvement of the HR advisors in LR consulting is adhoc and disparate, with no clear process for the interface between the HR Advisors, the LR Manager and the BL. BL managers go to their HR advisors on HR issues that come up in their groups, however the lack of experience of the advisors impedes the timely resolution of the labour issues that frequently arise.

In comparison with the NOC, there is a higher level of consultation in the UKOC, which is consistent with organisational trends identified by Charlwood and Terry (2007); Wilkinson et al (2004) as UK businesses began to move away from purely unionised voice structures, to hybrids and non-unionised forms. Charlwood and Terry (2007) in their survey of British workplaces in 2004 found that about 51% of employees have access to some forms of representation, to illustrate the scale of union decline in the UK. They found that organisations where a hybrid form of representation is in place involving both union and non-union consultation, recorded higher productivity and employee commitment outcomes. This research highlights the opportunity for a unionised workplace to enhance its organisational performance and employee alignment by driving increased non-union consultation as a complementary form of engagement.

Another key finding from the study is how accountability for LR is blurred with the LR manager reporting to the Staffing Manager; as a result he is viewed as being of lower status within the organisation. The need for clear accountability in managing LR was highlighted by McGuire et al (2009) who pointed out that with multiple parties which

include HR, the Union and the BL, it is crucial to have alignment on who needs to do what, and ensure that all parties have the competencies to discharge their roles. A situation where there is apparent internal disconnect on how labour issues arising from Field locations will be handled, needs to be properly addressed.

Taras and Copping (1998) had pointed out how unions by their nature are quick to perceive lack of internal alignment within HR or organisational leadership, and will not hesitate to exploit such weaknesses or inconsistencies to further their cause. The lone position of the LR Manager, the ineffective interface and stewardship with other HR functions, the lack of a structured mode of interaction with the team of HR advisors, is not meeting the business need of optimally managing LR in the highly unionised organisation. The issues of internal HR alignment and LR accountability therefore need to be resolved. The visibility of the LR Manager also appears to be an issue. Reporting to the Staffing Manager rather than the HR leader conveyed a reduction in status to other parties, particularly the union. With no HR Advisors supporting the LR Manager and an interface mechanism that is very blurred, there is some apparent confusion even by external parties on who has the principal call on labour matters and who is directly responsible for executing the labour strategy.

To better understand the dynamics of positional status in the NOC, one needs appreciate that the Nigerian society is culturally very hierarchical (Anakwe, 2002; Kamoche, K., 1997), with status and position recognised as critical influence factors. This explains the lack of influence the LR Manager has over other HR Advisors, who see him as their peer because all report to the same Manager, rather than a senior HR Manager driving the organisational labour strategy. The collectivist orientation of the Nigerian worker and the high levels of power distance are significant factors that can impact OE (Ahiazu, 1989; Anakwe, 2002).

With my working experience in the NOC and UKOC, I appreciate better the impact of significant cultural differences on work outcomes. In general, there is more positive autonomy and assertiveness amongst the professionals in the UKOC who feel a sense of ownership for their responsibilities and the mode of sharing and interaction

with supervisors and managers is very balanced, involving and constructive irrespective of levels. In contrast, professionals in NOC will tend to wait for a sense of direction from their Supervisors or Managers who can sometimes be very controlling. Disagreeing with a supervisor can be very detrimental to career prospects and hierarchy/reporting lines are strictly respected. Therefore, the ability to influence without authority in an LR role can be challenging in such a cultural context. Additionally, the Unions will by their nature default to the most senior accessible Manager, which in this case is the Staffing Manager because it conveys that a senior Manager treats the LR issues more seriously. These nuances are peculiar to the Nigerian context, and should be taken into account to enhance the effectiveness of the HR function.

From literature, we had reviewed how OE is directly related to cordial LR in an organisation, with improved productivity observed in a climate of active employee engagement and motivation (Anderson, 2007; Schuler, 1992; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). There is no evidence of a strategy of effective employee engagement and communication, particularly with unionised employees. The NOC is content with allowing the Union latitude for broad communication to employees. This is inconsistent with practise in the UKOC where I&Cs are used to communicate to employees. Cook (2008) had advocated an open communication approach to promote employee engagement and organisational alignment. In findings supported by Blackard (2000), the outcomes of such a cooperative engaging approach include deeper level of trust, industrial harmony and organisational alignment. The fundamental understanding that an organisation should communicate with its employees effectively drives the principle of I&C used by the UKOC. In the NOC however, there are no alternative communication platforms created to drive consultative practises, and the LR function is under-resourced and primarily based in the corporate head office. With majority of employees located in the remote sites, the LR structure or function must integrate these locations to be effective. The assessments from the interviews as well as the comparison with practises in the UK affiliate indicate a gap in meeting the objectives of aligning the organisation.

4.3.4 The role of HR Advisors and BL Supervisors in LR management

One of the key challenges that have been identified with the adoption of HRM practises and the move towards a form of the Ulrich (1997) three legged stool model, is how often unprepared Line Managers are for the significant role they will play in people management. BL managers are increasingly involved in job design, staffing recruitment, talent management, performance reviews and management, wage negotiations and absence management amongst others. Problems however arise where managers without adequate training, begin to administer these programmes either inconsistently or not at all (Taylor and Woodhams, 2012). The issues identified in the NOC point to an organisation that is making progress in implementing HRM, but there are still concerns with the ability of front-line Managers and supervisors to engage their employees.

In our earlier literature review, we had discussed how HRM effectiveness is determined by the level of shared execution within the organisation (Armstrong, 1999; Ulrich, 1997; Dubois et al, 2005). Business performance is driven by the execution of HRM through multiple channels which include senior management, HR, and supervisors. Findings from this study show that people management activities such as performance management, reward and recognition, employee engagement and motivation continue to confound Managers.

With the high level of unionisation in the organisation, Supervisors were regularly confronted with labour concerns from their employees and required guidance from HR experts on how to manage these issues. However, the lack of HR connection with employees and supervisors created a gap in supervisory competencies to manage employee relations. There needs to be a deliberate and strategic plan towards up-skilling the competencies of Managers and Supervisors if the implementation of modern HRM practises is to succeed (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014). It is not uncommon for Managers to be unprepared for their expanded people management roles where HRM is implemented (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995). Sometimes they are reluctant to go along with the new direction and will rather have

HR handle such people matters for them. Reilly et. al (2007) highlighted the challenge in balancing responsibilities between line management and HR, as they found a trend whereby line management had eventually taken up less responsibilities than intended, with HR continuing to try to move more of these responsibilities. In general, the success of the HR delivery model is mainly hinged on how well HR partners with the BL, and how well each party is able to play its part in delivering quality service (Hird et al, 2009). Managers play a significant role in driving active employee engagement in the workplace on a sustainable basis, and need a keen understanding of their employees, and how best to speak to employee concerns (Baumruk, 2006). However, the situation in the NOC indicates that managers were not competent or prepared to discharge their people management responsibilities. Rather respondents from the HR organisation, BL Managers and even the Union have concerns about the ability of Supervisors to handle employee LR issues within their teams.

The findings from this study show that in a unionised workplace the role of Supervisors and Managers becomes even more critical as they are the voice of management, and they connect organisational leadership with the employees. They also connect the HR organisation with employees by executing key people management programmes facilitated by HR. Such significant responsibility requires very competent and knowledgeable supervisors and Managers. Swift (2012) explains how the change in HR delivery systems to the three legged model has resulted in a shift of attention from HR services in general, to catering more to the needs of senior management. HR in this mode can easily become more concerned with maintaining their seat at strategic business tables and meeting performance indicators (CIPD, 2007). In doing so, they neglect the primarily responsibility of employee advocacy and even engaging effectively with middle and lower level supervisors and managers. The drawback of such an approach is an organisational misalignment, and the front-line supervisors and managers are not equipped to share the managerial perspective in a manner that will connect with the average workforce. Concentrating HR efforts only at the top of the organisation creates a halo of HR effectiveness that did not improve employee contentment or engagement. In the case of the NOC, the front-line

supervisors and Managers who play a critical role in driving LR in the organisation have been alienated.

BL managers often require support from their HR advisors to make sense of the HR issues they encounter. The HR role is all about personal credibility; competence, business knowledge and strategic contribution (Meisinger, 2005, p. 191). Ulrich et al (1995) had outlined updated competency domains for HR professionals, who seek to add value in a Global, technologically driven organisation. HR professions, including embedded Business partners should aim to be *Credible activists* who are able to make a case for particular action; *Culture and Change stewards* who drive change effectively to fit the cultural context of the organisation. In addition, they should be adept at *Talent Management*, be *Strategy architects* (including Organisational design), *Operational executioners* and *Business allies* that helps the BL develop their goals and respond to external opportunities and threats.

The HR business partners have a key role in keeping the organisation connected, supporting the BL managers in addressing the front line labour issues that arise, and involve the LR manager appropriately. Therefore, the LR model should be one led by the LR Manager with two key LR advisors in both major work locations, and with close integration with the HR business partners. The integration process between the HR Embedded Advisors and the LR team is a critical success factor within the operational model, as it can be argued that such integration should have also been achieved with the current structure where the LR Manager and the Embedded HR Advisors all reported to one Manager. However, the issue that have emerged from that structure is that the LR function had inadvertently been subjugated in priority and importance, and other stakeholders have not understood the rationale. In addition, given the cultural nuances within the Nigerian organisation we can deduce the importance of establishing the function as a well-resourced functional discipline, which integrates with other HR functions to ensure effective LR management.

We have examined how effectively the Union engaged its members, utilising every available channel, face to face, social media, emails, congresses and print media. In

contrast, frontline Managers and supervisors are not continuously engaged nor do they feel adequately prepared for their role in managing LR. However, what is even more apparent is the lack of an engagement strategy with employees in general. Related to this is the limited ability of the HR Advisors to even properly identify and intervene in a LR problem. According to Silva (1999, p.7), “successful integration depends on line managers accepting and practising the appropriate HRM policies. Moreover, employees should be integrated so that there is as little divergence of interests between those of the enterprise and the employee” An organisation will therefore benefit more from building collective competencies (HR, Managers, and Supervisors) in managing HRM and LR. Lawler and Mohrman (2003) recommended the practise of rotating people within HR, as well as between HR and the rest of the organisation as they found that this had the benefit of improving collective competencies.

4.3.5 LR Structure and Strategies

The LR in the NOC is under-resourced, led by a lone LR Manager whose influence on the organisation is limited by an obvious lower status and relatively less authority over the team of HR advisors. In comparison, the UKOC that has a lower percentage of unionised employees has a Manager and two very experienced advisors. The LR team support the embedded HR Advisors as well as BL Managers in managing employee communication, grievance and disciplinary issues. The findings from the study also support the LR function becoming more integrated with other regional and global functions. The NOC needs to start exploring more active engagement approaches that is complementary or separate from the union driven processes. In this aspect, there is much to learn from other affiliates who have an advanced structure of employee engagement through non-union channels. The UKOC holds quarterly I&C meetings, where employee representatives who are non-unionised meet regularly with each line manager to discuss business updates, and any other issues of general interest

The study findings also highlighted the limited partnership between the Union and the company. However, my analysis of LR strategy determinants as outlined by Fells (2003) indicate that a cooperative stance will be more effective in the NOC's context. This means that the business partner interface will need to be improved consistent with efforts at improving the state of LR. Oxenbridge & Brown. (2002) in their review of trade union practises in the UK found some benefits in organisations that provided some support towards improving the competency of union leaders particularly in mutual gains bargaining. This approach is beneficial to both parties, especially if the union wields significant influence and negotiates regularly with the organisation.

Employees have expressed concerns about the lack of engagement by the BL Managers and as a result are unable to confide in their supervisors about their issues. The result of this vacuum is that employee resort to the union to advocate on their behalf. This aggravates the overall state of organisational LR. Successful LR is hinged on staying engaged with employees and winning their hearts and minds (Rogers and Streeck, 2009). This means bringing management closer to employees, so that the LR issues and concerns are addressed as close to the issue as possible. It is important that in trying to improve communication, that the influence of the Union is not overlooked. Infact, the alternative consultative strategies should be complementary to union based engagement that already exists. Blackard (2000) had recommended using the union as a platform for employee engagement as part of a countervailing union management strategy. Based on recognition and mutual respect, both parties in a highly unionised workplace can still agree on how to share messages.

Some of these strategies while not directly linked to the structure of the HR organisation have a strong influence on the effectiveness of LR. Employee communication, supervisor effectiveness, union engagement and mutual gains bargaining are all key ingredients within an effective labour strategy. The NOC is dealing with many labour related issues, some of which are outside of the scope of this study. However, it is apparent that the recent changes in HR structure may have distracted key HR managers from other actions needed to improve the LR climate.

The internal issues that HR is grappling with as it manages the change, has not allowed it to focus effectively on broader employee relations across the organisation. It is important that in trying to improve the organisation structure and make it fit for purpose, the organisation does not lose sight of the need to address other important aspects of the employee relations framework.

Chapter five Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four reviewed the key findings from this study and outline the conclusions therefrom. I used semi-structured interviews to gather information from deliberately selected respondents. The primary objective was to examine the HR organisation structure in the NOC and review how it was influencing LR management. The findings have led to recommended improvements to the HR delivery systems that will strengthen organisational alignment and the capability to drive positive relations with the unions. This chapter summarises these findings, outlines the key recommendations and identifies areas for further research based on issues of interest that emanated from this study.

5.2 Summary of Conclusions

A historical merger resulted in a more disciplined managerial approach and this heightened workplace anxieties about employment and fuelled union participation. The high level of unionisation in the NOC was further strengthened, as the Union became an effective platform for protecting and seeking better conditions of service. The union had overtime developed very effective engagement tactics and are well represented in every location. They also leveraged technology to sustain regular communication, a strategy which I personally find positively intriguing, and one which every HR professional in a unionised workplace should keep an eye on. It is my opinion that employee engagement strategies should have a significant technology driven element in today's workplaces. The union engagement tactics are so effective that it is recommended that the NOC replicate similar tactics or develop cooperative strategies that will allow them utilise the union's platform where they are available.

My experience working in unionised workplaces have focused on limiting the influence of the Union. This rarely works effectively, as the Unions tend to feed off such management tendencies to motivate more 'employee opposition'. This study

has enlightened me about Unions' motivations and the realisation that genuine cooperation can actually take place in the workplace. Thinking back to period when I was involved in LR activities, the only reason we didn't have HR presence in Union briefing sessions as an example, was because it was inconceivable to be seen talking to employees with Union leaders. This was not necessarily because the Union leaders resisted such an approach but rather we did not want to legitimise the Union's briefing. However, that notion now seems irrelevant, as employees tend to believe Unions' briefing nonetheless, whether HR attends or not. By failing to participate, or co-drive such sessions, we were failing to provide a balanced view to employees and mitigate situations where the Union manipulate the communication for their own benefit. There is clearly a need to establish alternative communication platforms, including employee focused I&Cs, so that employees are better informed about organisational programmes and priorities. This will improve LR by fostering more accountability as well as strategic understanding of the business pressures.

In a culturally sensitive and high power distance society like Nigeria, the status of the LR Manager is important in effectively driving key strategies. In addition, the level of interaction between the HR Advisors and the LR Manager was suboptimal, and there was no integration with regional or global LR CoEs. The result of this isolation is that the Nigerian LR team has not adopted best practises for employee engagement and consultation, which are crucial elements of a sustainable LR strategy. I also found that the supervisors and managers were not adequately prepared for their new roles as more modern HRM practises were implemented in the organisation. There was also a minimal level of interaction with the LR function when labour issues develop. HR was more focused on very senior management as the HR Advisors grappled with their new consulting roles. The NOC needs to effectively leverage this engagement channel, empower the Managers and Supervisors with the right training and information, and strengthen the interface with the LR function.

A key challenge with the three-legged HR delivery model is that it comes with significant responsibility on HR Business partners who are required to adopt a consultative approach towards providing solutions to the business. Marchington

(2008) had advised that the change management should be executed properly for this model to work effectively. In the NOC, I found that the HR advisors did not have the required competencies and have not been deliberately developed for their role. There was also not enough clarity about role descriptions, role boundaries and interfaces with the rest of the HR organisation to empower them towards becoming strategic consultants. They were clearly grappling with their new roles and the limited collective experience in such three-legged HR organisations made it challenging for them to adapt. With no experience or a structured support system from an under-resourced LR function, the outcome was suboptimal HR support to the organisation.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Integrated LR Management

The recommended LR model from this study is one hinged on integrated communication and engagement of all key stakeholders. It is founded upon a well-resourced LR group led by a HR manager with senior and distinct status within the HR organisation. This role should be supported with competent and experienced LR advisors to ensure that support is provided to the rest of HR and the organisation in general. The LR Manager will therefore have key advisors in the major locations and is able to quickly intervene and manage issues before they escalate. Given the significance attached to positional status and authority in the Nigerian context, the LR Manager should be of comparable status to other HR Managers and should report directly to the Country HR Leader. This will ensure that there is no confusion on who has direct responsibility for LR, as BL Managers and Union leaders will have more clarity in their interface with HR.

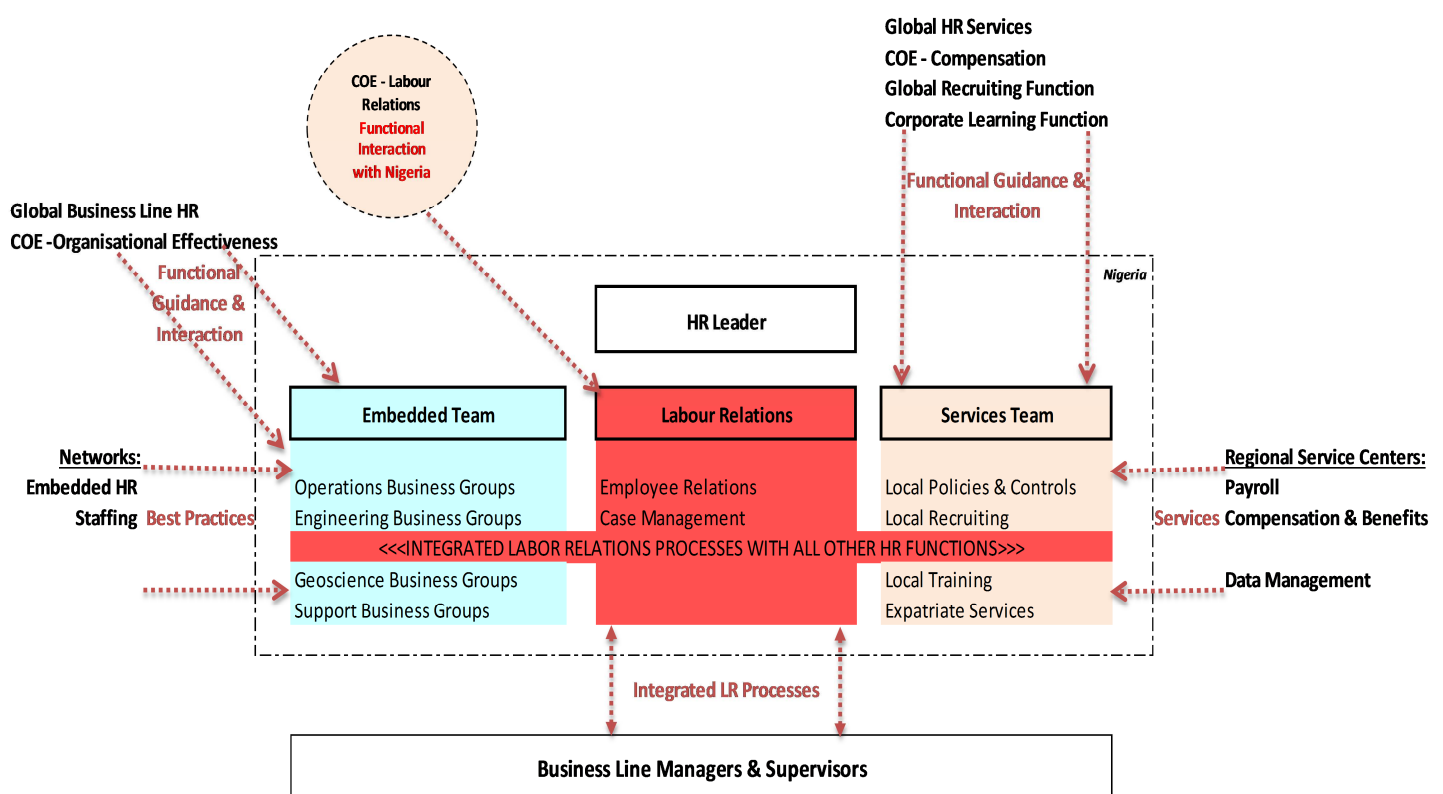
The issue of integration with the HR Business partners also needs to be strengthened, particularly with the structuring of the LR group into a stand-alone, well-resourced unit. This is only achievable with good cooperation between the LR Manager and the Staffing Manager. Their priorities and objectives should be aligned, and the functional need for cooperating should be driven by the HR leader.

Strategically, all HR Managers should be involved in the formulation of employee and LR strategies. Given that the HR Advisors are embedded to support their respective business units, there is already an expectation from the BL that they will get support from their embedded HR partners in managing people and labour issues.

The recommended organisational structure seeks to promote LR consultation and empowerment on three fronts as shown in Figure 6 below:

- LR deployment through all HR embedded BL Advisors
- LR empowerment for all BL Supervisors and Managers
- An integration of country LR structure with the Regional and Global LR Networks/CoEs as well as other local associations or platforms that will promote sharing of best practises and experiences.

Figure 6 Model of HR Organisation to strengthen LR Management



The premise of this modelling is that LR cannot exist in isolation, nor can it be effectively discharged by one or two specialists. It is a discipline, which in this context needs to be developed across the embedded HR function. There were significant gaps in the in the competencies of HR Advisors highlighted in this study, which is challenging considering how their role can strategically enhance the state of employee relations. “HR professionals must be competent, not only in their field but also as business professionals”, (Meisinger, 2005, p. 190). While it is expected that HR Advisors will develop competencies from their work experiences, they need to be prepared and provided support through their new roles to ensure success. This was not the case in the NOC, and a program for HR competency development should be a key organisational priority.

5.3.2 Information and Consultative Practises

The study findings point to a Union that is actively and continuously engaging its members. There is value in understanding and even replicating some of the union tactics of multiple media employee engagement. The CIPD (2010) guidance for sustainable employee engagement, recommends assessing and modifying managerial behaviour to build effective relationships with employees and actively supporting their development. Engagement in this context permeates all organisational levels, strengthens employee relations and improves organisational performance. There was no indication of whether a counter or cooperative engagement strategy with the union was going to be adopted by the NOC; but the study findings and reviews herein indicate a cooperative stance may be the most pragmatic approach. Townsend (2014) advised the adoption of multiple communication channels between workers and management, especially in a work environment with a powerful union. Blackard (2000) recommended using the union as a platform for this engagement and communication, which aligns with views expressed by some of the BL Managers in the NOC.

The NOC should also consider encouraging the right calibre of employees to participate in the union, and provide them information that will help them advocate a balanced business sustainability view. Since it is unlikely that a union elimination strategy will work due to legal and situational contexts, it may be pragmatic to actually try to positively influence the Union through its membership. The training and development of union executives should be supported to promote their competencies and leadership abilities. It is likely that as they become more competent in understanding business dynamics, they could become better business partners. By co-opting the union into key change programmes the company can leverage on the union network to become advocates for change. The Union can become an effective channel for upward feedback which is essential to ensuring a balanced approach when undertaking organisational change projects. By making union officials key participants to change projects, the company wins additional change advocates and is able to quickly identify and address key areas that may fuel resistance and address those issues promptly.

Integration with the rest of the LR network within the organisation confers the benefit of sharing resources and proven practises of how to engage and build employee commitment.. The structural proposal therefore include direct functional interaction and networking between the NOC LR group and the rest of the LR network within the organisation. An I&C process should also be established that will be driven by the HR Advisors for each of their clients, with support from the LR Manager and Advisors. With a frequency of not less than once a quarter, a meeting between the BL Manager and cross section of employee representatives should meet for information sharing and business updates. This process should run side by side with meetings already established as part of the labour processes documented in collective agreements. This will provide the organisation with a platform to make sure the right messages are getting to employees though other mediums apart from the Union.

5.3.3 Developing HR Competencies for LR Intervention

For HR business advisors in a highly unionised organisation, their roles must have clearly defined LR responsibilities. The development of HR Advisors therefore must follow a well-structured path that provides them significant exposure to LR issues to equip them with key competencies like emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, effective negotiation and mutual benefits bargaining. It is recommended that HR professionals work within the LR function for at least 1-2 years before they are appointed into HR Advisor roles. We have seen from this study that HR advisors with LR experience felt more empowered and were adjudged as more competent by the BL. As a start, the NOC should start rotating HR advisors through the LR advisor roles to build collective competence. The LR advisors that will be based in key location should interface with employees, BL Advisors and frontline Managers and supervisors towards managing key issues that come up.

5.3.4 Empowering Supervisors and Managers

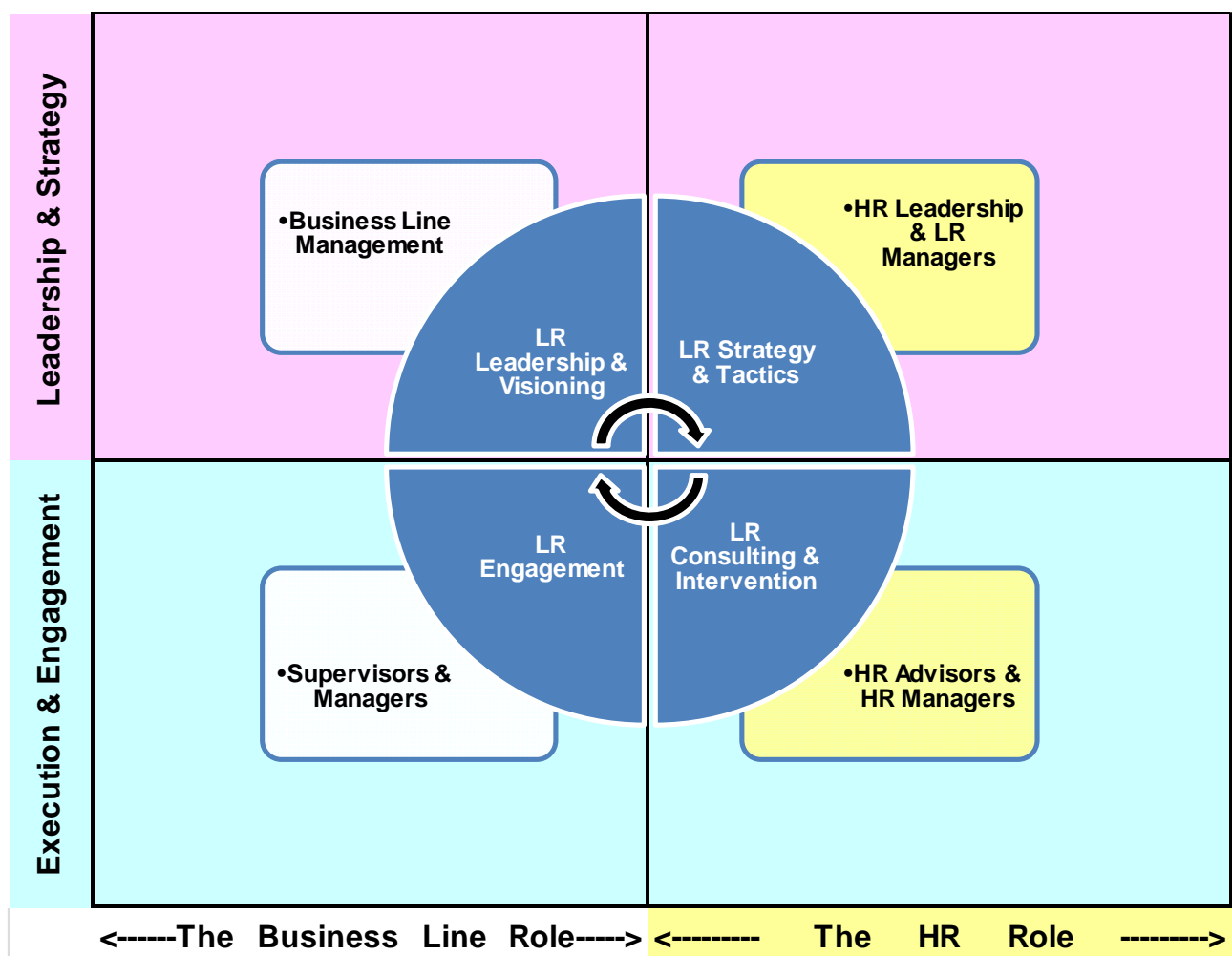
The empowerment of frontline Managers and Supervisors is an integral part of a progressive LR strategy. They should be well informed and should be required to undergo leadership classes that embed fundamental LR overview and best practises as a pre-requisite to Supervisory appointments. Supervisors must understand the benefits of employee engagement, and processes should be in place to cascade messages through the Supervisors and require that they hold open sessions with their employees and respond to feedback. There is therefore an urgent need for the NOC to embark on an aggressive training of the FLS and Managers on employee relations, unionisation dynamics and employee engagement. HR also needs to deliberately drive a communication strategy that is hinged on empowering Managers and supervisors with information. Union officials should not be privy to information that is not available to Managers – as information is power in unionised workplaces. So as issues are discussed with unions, summary communication messages should concurrently be prepared and disseminated for Managers to use with their teams. This has two key advantages, empowering the Managers and limiting the ability of

the union to skew the messages for their other self-interest purposes. In addition, periodic leaders' briefs or business update sessions should be held with Managers across the organisation, with the expectation that they will hold smaller meetings with their team members to cascade information and collate feedback. This should happen fairly regularly, at least quarterly as communication within the organisation is an integral part of effective LR.

5.3.5 Framework for LR Management in Highly Unionised workplaces

The study recommendations can be summarised into an easily applicable framework for managing LR in highly unionised workplaces. This is shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7 Framework for LR Management in Highly Unionised Workplaces



Two broad responsibilities can be identified:

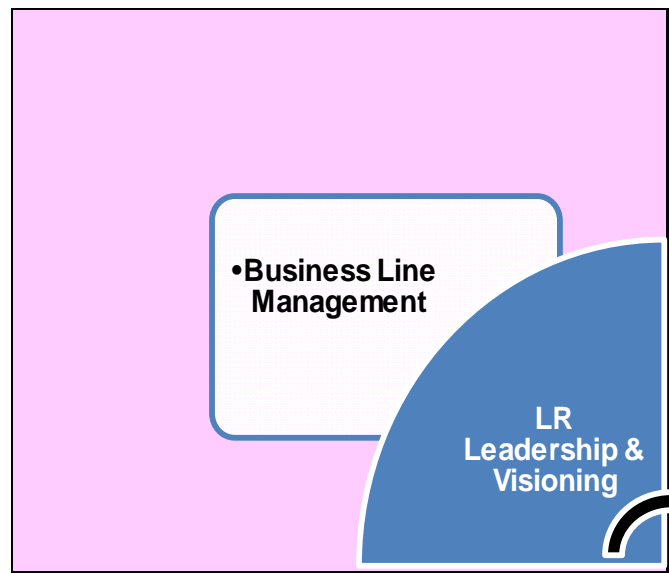
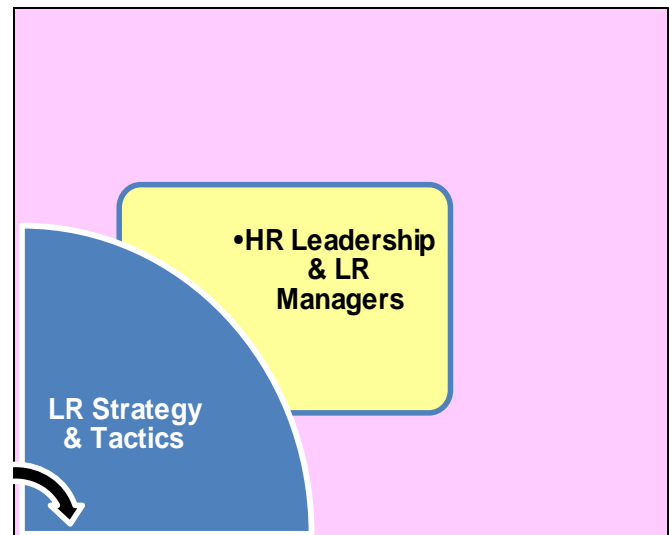
- The *BL role* in LR Management is depicted by the left half segment of the framework. It starts with firstly identifying the key business objectives that are impacted or influenced by LR and developing the strategies that will optimise the relationship. Secondly, the BL takes a lead in employee engagement and direct execution of the LR strategies through Supervisors & Managers. They do this through one to one supervisory dialogue, team briefings, participating in union engagement and consistently advocating the business case. The key principle here is that the BL owns the LR Strategy and takes the lead in executing it, consistent with modern approaches to HRM practises (Swift, 2012; Armstrong and Taylor, 2014). HR plays the role of a strategic partner, consulting and helping shape the strategy, as well as working closely with Supervisors in execution. To the average employee, the supervisors and Managers should be the voice of the organisation, providing support, insight, resolving concerns and driving alignment.
- The *HR Role* highlighted in the right half of the framework starts with HR Leadership partnering with Senior Management to outline the key people priorities and strategies therefrom. This includes the provision of LR intelligence and expertise, with HR also playing a role in the direct execution of these strategies. This involves collaborating with Managers and Supervisors in engaging employees, crafting appropriate messages, providing information to empower supervisors and managers in their roles, and intervening in challenging LR situations. By also coordinating the ongoing interface with the Union, HR Advisors and Managers can drive consistency in practise and messaging, a crucial element when dealing with a large and active Unionised workforce.

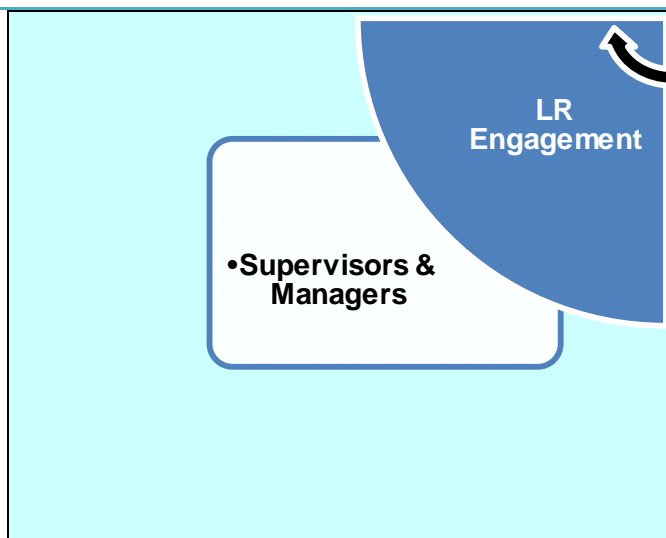
The upper half of the framework highlights the *leadership and strategic elements* of LR Management. This is where organisational visioning takes place, where the business defines what its key LR principles are and how it will integrate these

principles with other organisational priorities. In the case of the NOC, those principles should include Cooperative Relations with the Union, effective workplace dialogue and the empowerment of Supervisors and Managers. The bottom half focuses on *execution of the strategies and employee engagement*. This is led by front-line Supervisors and Managers actively supported by the HR Business Advisors and Managers. Employee engagement is crucial for any successful LR strategy, as the need for a Union decreases with effective communication and alignment with employees (Blackard, 2000; Fells, 2003). For LR to be positive and cordial within the organisation, all segments of the framework must be working optimally and more importantly in tandem, feeding and connecting with each other and adjusting Labour strategies and tactics according to situational outcomes. This is further reviewed in Table 6 below.

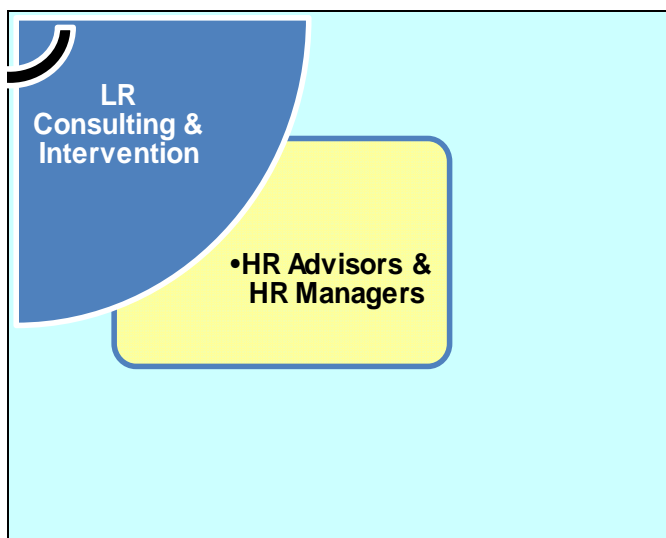
Other recommendations will include driving cooperative strategies that are hinged on mutual respect which engender partnership with the union on key change management projects. The Union should be integrated as participating stakeholders. “An organisation that is clear, consistent and effective in its communication with customers, employees, shareholders, creditors, and the community is in a good position to establish trust and to elicit their collaboration” (Harvard Business Review, 2003, p.9). As participants, they are more likely to support the business strategy and can become good sources of improvement suggestions. Union partnership does not undermine the right to manage, and considering the high level of union participation, cooperation with the Union will be a pragmatic strategy to adopt.

Table 6 Success Factors within the LR Framework

LR Framework Quadrant	Critical Success Factors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first quadrant represents organisational management role in the LR framework. • BL Leadership need to firmly believe in the importance of proactively managing LR • They must be committed to providing the required resources towards active union and employee engagement to make this work. • Management should be able to see how LR influences or aligns with overall business objectives, and appreciate the importance of positively influencing the interaction with the Union and the workforce.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR leadership must be acutely aware of the organisational pulse and key concerns of the workforce. The role of employee advocacy should remain a key priority at this level. • HR should strive to drive a balance between business objectives and employee needs. • At this level, internal and external LR intelligence is what makes a difference in how well the strategies that are developed advance organisational objectives.



- Supervisors & Managers must prioritise employee engagement. They should recognise the importance of connecting with their workers and addressing their concerns promptly.
- Supervisors & Managers must be trained and supported with timely and relevant information, to engage their workers.
- Supervisors & Managers must also have voice. They should be able to contribute meaningfully to labour strategy development and feel that they co-drive the organisational approach to LR.



- HR Advisors and HR Managers should have experience in managing LR issues in the workplace.
- Key competencies in Negotiations/Mutual Gains Bargaining, Emotional Intelligence, Networking & Positive interpersonal skills are crucial.
- Sustained interface with the LR specialist team is important towards ensuring the BL gets the support they need.
- The ability to build strong relationships with Union leaders and key workplace opinion leaders is important.
- HR Advisors should be able to gather valuable, real-time intelligence about key workplace issues to make reliable diagnosis for effective resolution.

5.3.6 Managing the Annual Bargaining Process

The annual bargaining process in the NOC takes quite a toll on resources and is characterised by a large list of pay, benefit and policy items that increases tension in the organisation. In comparison to the UKOC, this is not an effective practise and it will be in the interest of the NOC to explore changing the frequency and reducing the items they are bargaining. By lengthening the frequency, the organisation is able to return to normalcy and focus on key change issues. In addition, rather than wait for negotiations to discuss key issues of interest, it is better to discuss these issues outside of the more formal stringent climate associated with wage negotiations. Using the JCC platforms or even the proposed I&C platforms, issues can be effectively resolved such that a formal negotiation is not required more frequently than every two or three years. Another strategy is to define a set of items that will be agreed structurally for longer term like 2 – 4 years, for example tying comparative increases to changes in economic indices like inflation, cost of living. With this approach, formal discussions on major adjustments will be held only when significant changes occur in the market. These boundaries help limit the number of items that need to be discussed and make the negotiations more effective when they do. Moving towards these alternative approaches will require significant change management with the union officials and employees in general, as it hinges upon trust and fair-play between both parties.

In conclusion, the high level of unionisation within the organisation presents a different set of challenges from what exists in other more developed climes. The HR organisation in adapting the three-legged model must make it fit for purpose, so that it effectively supports the organisation and drives industrial harmony. There are clear linkages between a positive LR climate and improved organisational performance, and so the HR delivery model should prioritise the upskilling of HR advisors, supervisors and managers to effectively manage the LR issues they encounter. The model prescribed from this study hinges on integrating LR across multiple fronts and deliberately developing the competencies of mutual gains negotiation, employee engagement and effective communication throughout the organisation. A well-

resourced LR group, supported by a competent HR team and well-informed and adept Managers is a recipe for positive employee relations. The study does not recommend undermining Union participation, as this is not seen as a sustainable strategy in the Nigerian socio-political context. Rather the strategies recommended in this study can be complementary to existing collective bargaining practises, albeit improved for more efficiency. As trust grows between the organisation and the union, then the union can be leveraged upon as a key stakeholder and serve as an effective platform for employee engagement. An engaged workforce is a productive workforce, and the LR model developed in this study seeks to improve productivity by adapting the three-legged HR model to suit the unionised workplace.

5.4 Areas for future study

A significant element of LR in any economic venture or society is the influence that Government wields, through active regulation and legislation. This is even more pertinent in the Nigerian context, where the Oil industry is the major financial mainstay of the economy. The Government is therefore an integral player, both as an oil operator and regulator. The Government oil company, NNPC also has the highest number of union members in the industry and wields active influence on the leadership of the National unions. While this study briefly reviewed historical developments and existing legislation, the extent of Government's direct influence on the state of LR in the NOC was not explored extensively in this study. This was limited by time, study scope as well as possible access challenges this may pose. Nonetheless, it is an interesting area for future literary exploration, to understand how current Government actions or inactions influence union leaders and business managers, and shape LR in general. Clearly, understanding that relationship is crucial in framing a LR management framework, as the Government/legislation context will have some influence to the approach that business leaders and HR practitioners adopt towards managing unions in the workplace.

A key finding from this study is that Contractor Labour issues have become problematic in the NOC and in the Industry in general. This is primarily linked to the

increased utilisation of contractor resources by industry operators as they strive for more efficiencies and flexibility. There appears to be a capacity challenge on the part of the independent contractors to effectively manage their people issues. The Oil companies, who are the principals in this case, then get involved when services breakdown and sometimes labour protests take place illegally on their premises. It will be unsustainable for the company to try and manage contractor labour issues directly, and should rather try and leverage collective employer or government backed platforms to address this complex issue. A strategy that supports the improvement of contractor capacity so that the third party contractors can handle their labour issues may be progressive. In this regard, there will be benefit in engaging closely with the contractors in understanding their strategies and trying to build alignment with the NOC labour strategies. Leveraging on National networks to get the Ministry of Labour (MoL) more involved in regulating and mediating in labour issues particularly with smaller employers will be a beneficial strategy, although this is better executed through the employers association. Due to the complex nature of this issue that typically involves a significantly wide range of third parties, it should be further evaluated as it is outside the immediate scope of this study. Specifically, the impact of Contractor LR on Union attitudes and actions in the workplace, and the role of HR organisation in managing the issues will be of beneficial interest to businesses and LR studies.

The NOC is a multinational and so has a mix of local and international employees that work in the organisation, similar to other affiliates. The Nigerian Government has been promoting national development, with nationalisation targets legislated through a National Content Law which came into force in 2010 (NCDMB, 2010). What emerged from the interviews were strong opinions by Union leaders against the utilisation of expatriates in the organisation. While such sentiments may not be unusual in post-colonial national unions, it is possible that there is a correlation between how strongly the unions react to expatriates and how cordial LR is in the Industry. This may therefore have significant impact on LR management, and how HR approaches employee engagement, expatriate staffing and the deployment of

HRM practises. This relationship between expatriate utilisation and LR will benefit from further investigation.

Lastly, there is a lot of literature on the changing nature of HR competencies particularly following the varied adoption of the three-legged model today (Ulrich, 1995; CIPD, 2007; Meisinger, 2005). The quest for HR to be more strategic has led to a prioritisation of critical skills like OE, organisational design, change management and consulting. Part of the recommendations from this study include the need to improve the LR competencies of HR Advisors to enable them add more value to BL Managers. This can be studied further to identify the suite of competencies required in unionised workplaces, and to identify strategies for developing such competencies in HR organisations.

Appendix I

Research Questions	Interview questioning themes (used in a semi structured manner, and adjusted to fit the context of respondents i.e. Union, HR or BL)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the current HR organisational structure affect LR management in the NOC? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you briefly describe your role in HR/Union or the Organisation? Briefly describe your current HR organisational structure and how LR is managed within this structure? How has this changed over the years, and what were the key drivers for this change? Is this typical with HR organisations in the Industry or in other affiliates? What are your primary internal and external HR interfaces, and how effective are they under the current HR organisational structure? How effective is your relationship with the HR team? Describe what aspects work well and which do not? Do you interface with Union members or leaders? What do you think about the role of the Union within the organisation? How is LR managed today in the UK/Nigeria organisation? What aspects of your organisational history have impacted your approach to unionism today and why? As a Manager (or Union leader) , do you feel you have prepared enough as an organisation to handle any LR challenges that may manifest?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the vision and objectives of the Union within the organisation today? What do you think other Union leaders and members think about this vision? • How do you engage your members to ensure that their opinions and views are well articulated? Can you explain how union messages disseminated within the organisation today? • Is there any other information you have to share about the HR organisational structure that is relevant to this study?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the HR organisational structure drive alignment with the BL? Does it effectively empower Line Managers and Supervisors to effectively manage LR in their business units? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think are the key drivers for cordial or effective LR within your organisation today? • Describe the nature of your relationship with other LR stakeholders such as the Union leaders, the BL Management, other industry HR leaders/Managers, the Ministry of Labour and employees? • How will you assess the level of support you receive from HR in managing your employee issues? • What is your assessment of the current way LR is managed in the organisation? • Are there improvement opportunities you see in HR's roles in managing LR? • Is there a clear organisational labour strategy in place, which you understand and support? Are there aspects you will like to see changed? • How effective is your relationship with the Union leaders? Describe what aspects work well and which do not?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective is your relationship with the rest of organisational leadership? In your opinion, what are the key business challenges facing the organisation today and what should be done about it? • Is there any other information you have to share about how the BL works with HR that is relevant to this study?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role if any, should HR Advisors have in the management of LR in a highly unionised workplace? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you briefly describe your role in HR/Union or the Organisation? • Describe how you interface with HR in managing LR issues? What works well? What doesn't work well? • How helpful is your HR Advisor or Manager? Describe your interface and how effective this has been for you? • Describe how you interface with the Union in managing LR issues? What works well? What doesn't work well? • Are there opportunities to strengthen, improve or change the nature of these interrelationships with other stakeholders? • Are there improvement opportunities you see in HR's roles in managing LR? • Is there a clear organisational labour strategy in place, which you understand and support? Are there aspects you will like to see changed? • How will you assess the level of support you receive from HR in managing your employee issues? • Do you feel that your HR Advisors /Managers have the required competencies to discharge their roles

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how your HR Advisor supports you in managing LR • Describe examples of how HR intervened in particular labour issues you encountered recently • Describe your experiences as a HR professional /Manager and how those experiences help you manage LR • Is there any other information you have to share about your interface with HR that is relevant to this study?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What recommended enhancements to the organisation structure and LR strategy should the NOC consider to improve LR management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there opportunities to strengthen, improve or change the nature of these interrelationships with other stakeholders? • How are the rest of the HR organisation empowered to manage LR issues • Are there any HR organisational changes that you think will make enable a more cordial state of LR? • What LR strategies have you found effective within your organisation? • What are the key issues you are dealing with in the organisation today, and why are they a challenge? • What are they key challenges the union is dealing with in the Nigerian Oil Industry? • How are the rest of the HR organisation empowered to manage LR issues • Is there any other information you feel will be relevant to this study?

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